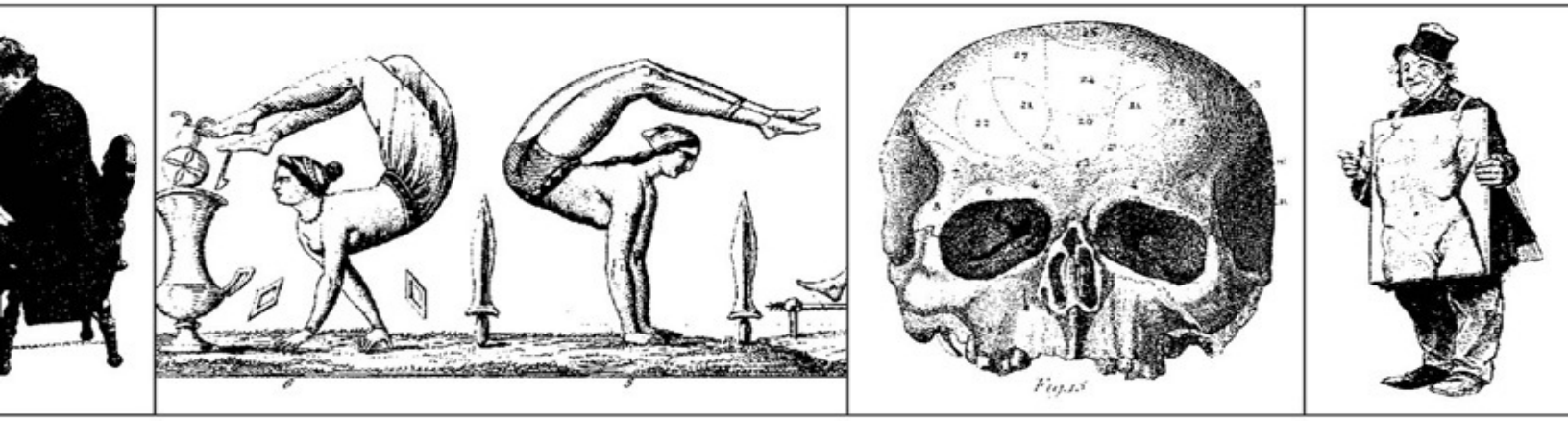
Bouvard and Pécuchet



the last novel of

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

in a new translation by Mark Polizzotti

with a preface by Raymond Queneau

Bouvard and Pécuchet

"Flaubert, the writer's writer par excellence, the saint and martyr of literature, the perfector of realism, the creator of the modern novel with *Madame Bovary*, and then, a quarter of a century later, the assistant creator of the modernist novel with *Bouvard and Pécuchet*."
—Julian Barnes

"Among all the works of this brilliant writer, *Bouvard and Pécuchet* is definitely the deepest, the most thorough, the broadest… It is the Tower of Babel of the sciences, where all the diverse, opposing, and absolute doctrines—each having its own language—demonstrate the powerlessness of effort, the vanity of affirmation, and the ever eternal 'misery of everything.'"
—Guy de Maupassant

"The man who, with *Madame Bovary*, forged the realist novel was also the first to shatter it."
—Jorge Luis Borges

"[*Bouvard and Pécuchet*] can be regarded as the inauguration of a new form which has no precedents."
—Ezra Pound

"[Bouvard and Pécuchet] are the ancestors of the many unnattractive heroes of modern fiction… Bloom in *Ulysses* by James Joyce, Samuel Beckett's heroes in all his novels and plays. They are the beginning of the anti-hero in modern fiction."
—Enid Starkie

"He will use fiction itself to vanquish fiction; he will arrange, and maneuver, and contrive, to such bland effect that no one will ever afterward be quite sure where contrivance began and serendipity left off. He will use with cunning every device of the merely facile novelist; and the result willl be such a compendium of unreality that it will seem real."
—Hugh Kenner

"Flaubert inspires in me an affection that I don't feel for any other writer."

—Jean Echenoz

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Selected Letters of Gustave Flaubert

Bouvard and Pécuchet

the last novel of
GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

in new translation from the French & with an introduction by
MARK POLIZZOTTI

followed by the
Dictionary of Accepted Ideas
and the
Catalogue of Fashionable Ideas

and featuring a preface by
RAYMOND QUENEAU



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Stan and Ollie in the Lab

IN THE SUMMER OF 1872, the fifty-year-old Flaubert wrote to the literary salonist Edma Roger des Genettes, "I'm contemplating something in which I'll vent all my anger. Yes, at last I shall rid myself of what is stifling me. I shall vomit back onto my contemporaries the disgust they inspire in me, even if it means ripping my chest open."

Originally titled "The Story of Two Nobodies," this was to be an encyclopedic panorama of human stupidity, the project for which had occupied him for decades, and which finally reached near-fruition as his last, unfinished novel. Contemplation not being the same as execution, it was a full two years after the letter to Mme. des Genettes that he announced to his Russian colleague Turgenev, "On Saturday, August 1, I shall at last begin *Bouvard and Pécuchet*! There will be no turning back. But such terror! It is as though I were embarking on an immensely long voyage, toward unknown regions, and that I shall never return." He never did, for six years later Flaubert was abruptly carried off by a cerebral hemorrhage, and his long voyage was still incomplete.

It was not from lack of trying. Despite his relatively modest bibliography (especially when compared with his contemporaries Balzac, Hugo, and Zola), Flaubert was a highly dedicated and hard-working writer. Each of his novels required vast amounts of research, whether in the field or on the printed page: for *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, he famously read some fifteen hundred volumes, much like the protagonists themselves—and not without their litany of complaints. "I'm going to have to study a host of things I know nothing about," he told Mme. des Genettes. "One would have to be insane, completely deranged, to take on such a book!" The enterprise appears even more insane when we consider that a huge portion of his research ended up on the cutting room floor, and that entire months of perusing specialized works sometimes yielded only a paragraph or two of text.

In addition, Flaubert labored over every word, every sentence, in a seemingly quixotic search for perfection. Crafting his prose (or so legend has it) at the excruciating rate of five words per hour, he could not compete with his more prolific colleagues—though he appears to have compensated for his painstaking approach to fiction with torrents of correspondence. "A good prose sentence should be like a good line of poetry—*unchangeable*," he wrote to his sometime lover Louise Colet. "No one has ever conceived a more perfect type of prose than I." And to his niece Caroline Commanville, announcing the end of the novel's penultimate chapter, the last he would complete: "Each time I read it over, I discover new flaws! It has to be *perfect*." Of the various

commonplaces that have attached themselves to Flaubert's name, one of the most tenacious, and with good reason, is his relentless pursuit of the *mot juste*.*

Nor was *Bouvard and Pécuchet* written in a continual sweep. Discouraged in part by the scope and ambition of what he had undertaken (his biographer Francis Steegmuller calls this "the most devastating of his books in conception and most grindingly difficult in execution") and in part by misfortunes in his own life, Flaubert abandoned the novel midway through chapter 3 to write the less taxing *Three Tales*. No doubt the most devastating of his misfortunes was the financial ruin of his beloved niece Caroline in 1875, which led Flaubert to sell his farm in Deauville and expend nearly all his capital—more than one million francs, a considerable sum—in an attempt to rescue Caroline and her husband, thereby condemning himself in his final years to a "permanent state of uncertainty." It is little wonder that penury and debt become increasing concerns for our heroes as the novel wears on, or that Flaubert spent the years 1875–76 in a state of deep depression.

As it happened, *Bouvard and Pécuchet* was begun under the sign of personal tragedy as well. In April 1872, a mere four months before his annuciatory letter to Mme. des Genettes, Flaubert's cherished mother, with whom he had lived most of his adult life, succumbed to a prolonged illness. "I have realized during the past fortnight that my poor dear mother was the human being I loved the most," he wrote to George Sand. "It's as though a part of my entrails were torn away." But the passing seems also to have acted as a kind of liberation, a removal of constraints that were quite likely self-imposed: "I shall at last vent my resentment, vomit my hatred, spit out my bile, ejaculate my rage, cleanse my indignation," he told his friend Léonie Brainne in August, in terms remarkably similar to the ones he used with des Genettes in that same period (the image of "vomiting" in fact recurs fairly frequently in his correspondence on the subject).

Flaubert had plenty of resentment to vent. The Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and the ensuing revolts—during which he'd served as a local drill sergeant, an episode caricatured in *Bouvard and Pécuchet* under the guise of the Revolution of 1848—had left him "nauseated, heartbroken at the stupidity of [his] fellow countrymen [and] the incorrigible barbarism of the human race." (In fact, the whole of chapter 6 is a very direct satire of French political thought under the Second Empire.) Some thirteen years before that, the famous obscenity trial over *Madame Bovary*, though ultimately resolved in his favor, demoralized him to the point of wishing "to return, once and for all, to the solitude and the silence from which I emerged; I should like to publish nothing, and never again have myself talked about."* And as late as 1879, a sinecure as a library curator that he was forced to pursue after Caroline's financial debacle, humiliating enough in itself, was then lost to a rival's maneuverings. Overall, the blackness that suffuses this comedy from start to finish, and that deepens as the story nears what would have been its end, can largely be seen as a litmus test of Flaubert's own state of mind in

his twilight years.

At its core, *Bouvard and Pécuchet* is a classic tale of human aspiration: the age-old desire to be more than oneself, to reach fulfillment, to find happiness. Products of a time and culture that believed increasingly in the beneficence of scientific progress and the imperatives of conformity, Flaubert's protagonists struggle to come to terms with the onslaught of new knowledge confronting them, and with the societal attitudes that accompany it, by living out a veritable encyclopedia of modern pursuits. Pushed by their mutual shame at the limits of their education, as well as by their shared hunger for public recognition ("like all artists, they craved applause"), they set out to master discipline after discipline at an impossibly accelerated rhythm. Their quest takes them through the foreign lands of agriculture, chemistry and medicine, history and archeology, literature and aesthetics, politics, love (a *very* foreign land), spiritualism and religion, athletics and pedagogy—all the great fields of human endeavor as Western culture understood them at the time, and each approached with a bullish faith in their own abilities that more or less guarantees disaster.

True believers in search of beliefs, tourists of life, they sample the smorgasbord of human occupation, each time convinced they have found their just desserts and never once considering that their eyes might be bigger than their stomachs. The further they delve, the more our hapless autodidacts are flummoxed by tides of contradictory information, competing theories, new findings, and unverifiable assertions. The comedy, of course, stems from the disparity between their self-image as undiscovered geniuses, the unassailable gravity with which they go about their endeavors, and the hopeless inadequacy of their actual talents. In fact, the only talent they are able to maintain throughout the book is their devotion to each other—for this is also a tale of a remarkable and enduring friendship.

It is worth lingering for a moment on the notion of friendship, for it is the emotional anchor that keeps *Bouvard and Pécuchet* from being mere satire, and the kernel around which the novel's moments of genuine pathos crystallize. Flaubert is known to have suffered from epilepsy, a common characteristic of which is lowered sex drive. A devotee of prostitutes (from whom he caught several doses of syphilis, inflicted in the novel on poor Pécuchet), hermitic by nature, he invested far more emotional energy in his platonic friendships with a few intimates, mostly men, than in any of his frustrated female lovers. "As for sharing my life with a woman—marrying, as you advise—I find the prospect fantastic," he admonished the maternally solicitous George Sand. "Woman has never fitted into my existence." Can we read Bouvard's fumbling and desultory attempts to woo Mme. Bordin as a version of the author's own less-than-arduous affair with Louise Colet (who shared more than a few character traits with the apple of Bouvard's eye), or of his idealized and unrequited affection for Elisa Schlésinger (the Mme. Arnoux of *Sentimental Education*)? And might we see in Bouvard and Pécuchet's

self-sufficient duo a reflection of Flaubert's own devoted relations with Alfred Le Poittevin or Louis Bouilhet, both dead by the time he began writing the book?

More than anything, however, *Bouvard and Pécuchet* stages Flaubert's legendary intolerance for stupidity and the rigid bourgeois mentality; for the commonplaces, clichés, and biases that regulated society. (Such a statement has itself become a commonplace.) The roots of the novel, and its impetus, stretch back much farther than its actual composition. At the age of nine, Flaubert was already telling a boyhood companion, "If you'd like us to work together at writing, I'll write comedies and you can write your dreams. And since there's a lady who comes to see papa and always says stupid things, I'll write them too." In his youth, he and his friends devised a fictitious persona, "Le Garçon" ("the boy"), which they took turns playing in order to mouth the most improbable absurdities to unsuspecting interlocutors, for the muffled amusement of those in on the joke. And detailed discussions of the "Dictionary of Accepted Ideas"—a lexicon of the clichés that held sway in Flaubert's time, included at the end of this volume—appeared as early as 1850.*

Flaubert's letters to friends and intimates, meanwhile, provide copious expressions of his loathing of stupidity. To Louise Colet, ca. 1852: "Saint Polycarp used to stuff up his ears, flee from wherever he was, and cry: 'In what times, O Lord, hast thou caused me to be born!' I am becoming like Saint Polycarp." To George Sand, 1867: "Stupidity and injustice make me roar. And in my corner I grumble against many things that are 'none of my business.'" To Ivan Turgenev, 1872: "Never have things of the mind counted for less. Never have hatred of all greatness, scorn of Beauty, and execration of literature been so outspoken." To Léonie Brainne, same year: "The immense stupidity of modern times enrages me." To Edma des Genettes, 1875: "Human stupidity is a bottomless abyss, and the ocean I see from my window seems to me quite small in comparison"… The list goes on, and on.

In *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, stupidity takes many forms, from the protagonists' hopeless pursuit of instant knowledge to the moronic (and ever-changing) social policies that crop up throughout. The most trenchant satire, however, is reserved for the mental laziness that leads us to have others do our thinking for us, that resists critical judgment, whether seen in the priest's knee-jerk denial of any viewpoint outside Church dogma or in Pécuchet's attempt to learn agriculture—a true gem—by aping the gardener's pose in the frontispiece of his manual. Just as it is seen, in our own time and place, in those who cannot imagine raising their children without reference to Spock or Brazelton, who don't see a film without a nod from Roger Ebert, or who genuinely believe that a "writer's workshop" can teach them talent.

But caveat lector: the game is more perverse than you think. Our heroes are no mere sponges; rather, they constantly attempt to weigh, critique, and second-guess the authorities they adopt and discard with dizzying speed. And yet all their attempts at

critical thinking, which more often than not leave them dazed and demoralized ("They gave up"—a perpetual refrain), seem only to confirm the horrible truth: that the world turns not on originality but on the self-lubricating machinery of stereotype.

In fact, this novel is constructed almost entirely on clichés, whether the seemingly endless stream of platitudes voiced by the characters, the dead-pan bromides encountered in the many works our heroes reference (many of which later reappear in the "Dictionary"), or the assumptions governing their choices of occupation. The book makes its intentions clear as of the opening sentence: "As the temperature that day had risen to ninety-two degrees, Boulevard Bourdon was completely deserted"—what could be more banal than the weather?* It is no accident that the protagonists are copy-clerks, and the novel's planned resolution, which finds them returning to their profession after having tried everything else under the sun, is telegraphed well in advance: in fact, Bouvard and Pécuchet have never stopped being copyists, and their constant absorption and regurgitation of discipline after discipline is just so much acting out of that mechanically reproductive act.

As Flaubert was well aware, he had set himself a considerable challenge in writing this book. To Léonie Brainne, even while confessing that his "secret goal" was "to so dumbfound the reader that he goes mad," he predicted that he would not succeed "for the simple reason that the reader won't read me—the book will put him to sleep from the start." And to Emile Zola: "There are no quotable *excerpts*, no brilliant scenes, just the same situation over and over… I'm scared it might bore people to death." A not unreasonable fear: even as the novel was being written, the critic Hippolyte Taine complained to the same Zola that "you see two snails trying to climb Mont Blanc. The first time they fall is amusing; the tenth is unbearable"—a sentiment that many reviewers echoed after its publication.

But boring it's not, once we've accepted the ground rules. And though the book does adopt from early on a notably repetitive structure and conceit, we might even pinpoint that very repetitiveness as a huge part of its comic effect. Think of the Three Stooges' head bonks and nose tweaks, or Laurel and Hardy's fine messes: the more we expect them, the funnier they become. When Bouvard and Pécuchet set out to create the liqueur to end all liqueurs, we *know* that the still they've constructed without the slightest notion of what they're doing is going to explode into a hundred pieces; and we can see, with black-and-white cinematic clarity, our two would-be savants cowering behind the furniture, faces smudged and terrified, as the last bits of their harebrained contraption rain down around them.

Despite his hesitations, what Flaubert wittingly lampoons in *Bouvard and Pécuchet* is not only the positivistic and progress-oriented zeitgeist he deplored, but also the accepted conventions of storytelling itself: Structural conventions, which dictate that the hero's adventures be varied enough to maintain the reader's interest—whereas here each

chapter follows its stubbornly uniform path, its unvarying series of calamities; psychological conventions, which require the protagonist to undergo some form of evolution—whereas Bouvard and Pécuchet emerge at the other end of their long journey remarkably close to where they started; and perhaps most of all, fictional conventions, which insist that the characters and their actions stay in the frame of their story—whereas here, with the "Dictionary of Accepted Ideas," the "Catalogue of Fashionable Ideas," and other addenda that Flaubert never finished assembling, the novel effectively becomes its own process of composition.

In this sense, *Bouvard and Pécuchet* is not only a great precursor of Modernism—it has rightly been placed alongside the avant-garde masterpieces of the twentieth century—but also, arguably, the first postmodern novel. This epic of ordinary life, as its author called it, this comic panorama in which nothing happens, anticipates not only Joyce and Musil but also the amusing non-plots of films like Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger than Paradise* or TV shows like *Seinfeld*. Unappreciated in its time, Flaubert's "comedy of ideas," which he felt he was the first to attempt, had to wait for the age to produce such figures as Borges, Calvino, and Perec before gaining acceptance. *Bouvard and Pécuchet* is not Flaubert's most famous book, and it is hardly the first to critique an author's times and society. But in its ability to create the *illusion* of humdrum everyday life (and keep it engaging), its self-devouring structure, and its humor that progressively corrodes the reader's every acquired certainty, it might well be the most forward-looking novel of the nineteenth century.

Perhaps more forward-looking than even its author realized. As Flaubert told a correspondent at the time, "The book's subtitle would be, 'On the Lack of Method in the Sciences.' In short, my goal is nothing less than to conduct a review of all modern thinking." To the majority who clung to the belief that science and industry were all to the good, Flaubert countered with the absurd sight of his two characters chasing after a hunk of knowledge, swallowing it whole, and having nothing to show for it but indigestion. But more than this, he unearthed a darker truth of scientific progress, one as yet largely unsuspected, and in our century all too familiar: that experimental dispassion so easily shades into depraved indifference. Through nineteenth-century eyes, the novel's most horrific moment is no doubt when the child Victor boils his pet cat just to see what will happen, a scene that still elicits a revulsion only partly tempered by the boy's youth and background. But the years have added their own patina to the story: for if the image of Bouvard and Pécuchet similarly experimenting on their patients, human and animal, with little regard for their well-being once suggested a portrait of laughable ineptitude, what it now can't help calling to mind is the ghoulish profile of a Josef Mengele, a Harold Shipman, or the "torture doctor" H. H. Holmes. From a perceived lack of method, our science has been proven to have far too much method, especially when turned against us.

Still, it would be a disservice to the author to make of his heroes simple clowns, comic *or* evil, just as it would be inaccurate to portray Flaubert as a distant intelligence sitting in judgment on the inanity of his times. As he knew all too well, stupidity belongs to no age or place; it is a universal human trait, one to which he himself was far from immune. "Stupidity does not sit on one side and Intelligence on the other," he wrote to Louis Bouilhet in 1855. "They're like Vice and Virtue—it takes an awfully shrewd mind to tell them apart." When all is said and done, Flaubert's two "nobodies," with their blindness and insight, their pettiness and nobility, their generosity and callousness, their buffoonery and despair, are none other than you and I.

Because Flaubert's sudden death left *Bouvard and Pécuchet* unfinished, there remain a number of unresolved questions as to the author's intent. The first edition of the book, published in March 1881, was based on some four thousand manuscript pages, as interpreted (and sometimes rewritten, expurgated, or added to) by Flaubert's niece Caroline, his literary executrix and one of the great villains of Flaubert scholarship. Modern research has undone much of her editorializing, which means that while the first nine chapters can still be considered relatively finished, portions of chapter 10, as well as the two concluding chapters and the other materials Flaubert meant to append to the novel (except for the "Dictionary of Accepted Ideas"), clearly remain in draft form. I have preferred to leave them as such, and not "smooth them out" as some previous editors, and some previous translators, have taken it upon themselves to do. Similarly, I have chosen not to belabor the text with notes to the many references and allusions it contains, preferring instead to let the novel be what its author meant it to be—an entertainment.

The present translation is based on the Garnier-Flammarion critical edition of 1999 (ed. Stéphanie Dord-Crouslé) and the annotated Livre de Poche edition of that same year (ed. Pierre-Marc de Biasi). Edited with reference to Flaubert's manuscripts, they correct a number of details that have crept into earlier editions (the name Gorgu erroneously spelled "Gorju," obvious oversights on Flaubert's part, Caroline's unauthorized insertions, and so on). The "Dictionary of Accepted Ideas" comes from the Garnier-Flammarion edition of 1966 (ed. Jacques Suffel). I am indebted to all three volumes for some of the background information in this foreword, as well as to Francis Steegmuller's edition of *The Selected Letters of Gustave Flaubert* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1953), Jean-Paul Santerre's *Leçon littéraire sur* Bouvard et Pécuchet *de Gustave Flaubert* (Paris: PUF, 1999), and Lionel Trilling's formidable introduction to the New Directions edition of *Bouvard and Pécuchet* (1954). My thanks as well to Mario Polizzotti for his careful reading.

This translation is for Sadi Ranson-Polizzotti and Jean-Louis Bouttes.

MP, *August 2005*

Preface
by Raymond Queneau

IN 1942, I WROTE AN INTRODUCTION for a Belgian edition of *Bouvard and Pécuchet* that never appeared—an introduction that was eventually published in *Fontaine* 31, out of Algiers. These were naïve pages, for I wasn't yet acquainted with the "bibliography" of the subject—the "literature" on the subject, as they say—and in all innocence I believed that the ideas (parallels, or points of view) I had strewn around my text were original and new. Since then, with a view toward writing the present preface, I read the necessary works on the question, and soon established (for this feat it was enough to be "tolerably lucid," a quality that Flaubert does not deny his "mediocre and simple" minds, Bouvard and Pécuchet) that everything I'd said had already been said before, and more than once at that. I must admit this didn't surprise me very much: I shouldn't exaggerate (firstly) my naïveté any more than (secondly) my originality. And besides, I'd taken precautions. Didn't the article in question begin like this?

> The posthumous works of Flaubert include a "Dictionary of Accepted Ideas," the acknowledged goal of which was that "once someone has read it he will no longer dare open his mouth, for fear of coming out with one of the statements it contains." While it has not been proven that what Bouvard and Pécuchet are copying, at the end of the unfinished book that bears their name, is in fact this "Dictionary" (it seems more likely to have been a *sottisie*r [a collection of stupid utterances] called the "Album," which was no less formidable), it's still true that what we know of *this* book, as it has come to us, already produces the effect intended for the "Dictionary": after having read it, and reread it, one no longer dares formulate any judgment on one's own account for fear of putting one's foot in one's mouth, using one of the same stupidities that would have enriched Bouvard and Pécuchet's anthology.

And didn't it end (after an unbearable allusion to the work of "one of our contemporaries") with an invocation to "the *sottisier* that would have put an end to the novel, and in which pride of place would surely have been reserved—with allowances for chronology—for the very preface we have just completed"?

The idea must have struck me as good (a stupid satisfaction), for I began my new

preface thus:

> Writing an introduction to *Bouvard and Pécuchet* belongs to the genre of presumptuous enterprises before which one must fall on one's face; for there is no doubt that such a fragment of literature contains, in essence, such an abundance of blunders, commonplaces, howlers, fooleries, stupidities, imbecilities, accepted ideas, and nonsense, that the text should not figure at the head of the work, but instead, in all justice, in the fundamental chapter in which Flaubert meant to dispense the riches of his *sottisier*.

Well, this kind of cunning isn't new. It has been perpetrated before. I found it in Thibaudet's *Flaubert*—a passage that (I'm sorry to say) had escaped me:

> When faced with *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, the critics throw up their hands, chastising Flaubert as a gifted young man who went wrong. While on the other hand (a purely Flaubertian gesture) they remain united about [Huysmans's character] Mr. Folantin in the back room of a sinister delicatessen, at the same time they hail *Bouvard* as the gospel of naturalistic copy-clerks and a masterwork of the human spirit. These judgments, contradictory as they are, already seem present in the atmosphere of the unfinished novel: they give it a kind of ending, and are incorporated in a virtual second volume (as precious as the first, real one)…the "Dictionary of Accepted Ideas," the "Great *Sottisier*," and the "Judgments on *Bouvard and Pécuchet*." One cannot speak of Bouvard without saying something that might appear in the "Dictionary" or the "*Sottisier*." Let us resign ourselves to this condition, or rather accept it as a glorious necessity—as proof of the plasticity and vitality of the book.

But, naturally, since it's Thibaudet talking, I no longer agree. This subterfuge strikes me as too easy. Clearly, if according to Flaubert himself there could never be *one* single masterwork of the human spirit, this doesn't prevent *Bouvard and Pécuchet* from being one of the masterpieces of Western literature—an opinion which, I am persuaded, would not have appeared in the *sottisier*. And then—a very simple remark, but one that Thibaudet doesn't dare to make—not *everything* appears in the *sottisier*. There is hope.

As for the "virtual" second volume of which Thibaudet speaks (in rather whimsical fashion), what I said about it myself in my first introduction is extremely rudimentary, and at once made manifest my ignorance in Flaubertology. While I was familiar with René Descharmes's work *Autour de* Bouvard et Pécuchet, *Etudes documentaires et critiques* (Paris, 1921), I had missed D. L. Demorest's book *A travers les plans,*

manuscrits et dossiers de Bouvard et Pécuchet (Paris, 1931). In chapter 8 of his book, Descharmes "proved" that the "Dictionary of Accepted Ideas" could absolutely not have figured among the texts copied by Bouvard and Pécuchet: how, really, could these two puppets be the authors of a work that presumes its author to have—at the very least—a good dose of critical spirit? But Demorest published some of Flaubert's unpublished plans, and the "Dictionary" is mentioned in them. Therefore the two copy-clerks hoist themselves up here, raise themselves to Flaubert's own level.

In my first introduction, neglecting to use the oratorical precautions that I denounced a moment ago, I continued in kind, imagining myself to be killing off some vile product of critical drivel:

> Thus, *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, which has been and remains for some a unique work —the Book—reigns by a sort of Terror that is eminently salubrious. For if we see in Flaubert's last work a picture of human stupidity, we can't be long in perceiving that, like sheep, we are following a very great commonplace; and that to repeat that these two heroes are only "imbeciles from top to bottom," as one of the most obtuse critics of the nineteenth century wrote, is to fall into the most vulgar and superficial interpretation, formally contradicted by Flaubert himself. "They learned about discoveries, read prospectuses, and their newfound curiosity caused their intelligence to bloom." Again: "Their superiority was painfully obvious." And again this passage, where the author reveals himself—and he was no imbecile, top or bottom: "Then their minds developed a piteous faculty, that of perceiving stupidity and being unable to tolerate it. Insignificant things saddened them: newspaper advertisements, a burgher's profile, an inane comment overheard by chance. And reflecting on what was said in their village, and on the fact that one could find other Coulons, other Marescots, other Foureaus stretching to the ends of the earth, they felt upon their shoulders the weight of the entire world."

But this is a commonplace of Bouvard-and-Pécuchetian exegesis (cf. Descharmes, chapter 9, and Demorest, pp. 24ff). Or again, Edouard Maynial, in his preface to the Garnier edition: "Contrary to an accepted idea—another accepted idea—Bouvard and Pécuchet are not imbeciles; they are by far the most sympathetic specimens in the book…" Moreover, this is just the impression Flaubert intended to give: "To show how and why each of the secondary characters execrates the Sciences, the True, the Beautiful, the Just: 1) by instinct, 2) out of self-interest" (Demorest, p. 35).

Demorest likewise published the following note by Flaubert, taken from his initial outline: "They are not two imbeciles, precisely; they have many sentiments and the embryos of many ideas which they have trouble expressing." Elsewhere he says of them

that they are "two rather lucid, mediocre, and simple souls." In another plan, he writes, "Through the sole fact of their friendship, they develop intellectually." Demorest picked up all the passages from chapter 1 that show this development, at the same time as their hankering after learning and their contempt for mediocrity. What is more, they have courage. From the first pages, Pécuchet shows it by taking off his flannel undershirt—which is audacious and full of risk. They have the courage of their convictions; they are not afraid of being scandalous, even to the Count de Faverges. When they become "reformers," they are threatened with prison by Foureau, but declare that they don't give a damn about the sub-prefect, the prefect, "or even the Council of State." They do not shrink from any paradox, and do not hesitate to indulge in the most dangerous experiments, even if the danger is to their own persons. If they are interested in magic, they seek to raise the devil; if in hypnotism, they practice it. Nothing is more concrete than their proceedings; their research is not solely in books. They have barely picked up any notion or bit of information before they seek to verify it. And when the local policeman comes to harass them because of their anatomical mannequin, they aspire to "suffer for science." Doubtless they lack humor. When Pécuchet tries to imitate the hissing of the asp in Marmontel's *Cleopatra* and blows the effect, it makes them laugh "well into the evening." And at the beginning of their friendship, "when asked for their identification papers, they pretended to have lost them, claiming to be two foreigners, two Englishmen." This is more or less like "Le Garçon," that mythical character of Flaubertian folklore, but at bottom hardly corresponds to their characters. They seldom laugh, and never "have fun." As for the novel itself, there is nothing lighthearted about it. "I want to produce such an impression of lassitude and ennui," said Flaubert to Maxime Du Camp, "that in reading this book one could believe it had been composed by a cretin." Meanwhile, Flaubert had the "pretension" to write a "comical" book, but elsewhere, he speaks of a "thing," his new work, which would be "serious and even frightening." "No one has yet attempted the comedy of ideas," he remarks, but he writes elsewhere, "Their [Bouvard and Pécuchet's] grotesqueness is chiefly in their speeches and in their manners, more than in their ideas." "To create laughter with the theory of innate ideas: do you see the program?" (Cf. the quotes collected by Demorest, pp. 72ff.)

The fact that the two copyists are finally ready to establish not only the "Album" but also the "Dictionary" shows, on the other hand, that they have to a certain degree become Flaubert's mouthpieces—especially Bouvard, whose meditations on philosophy and society, critiques of religion, and philosophical attitudes are clearly those of Flaubert himself.

When Bouvard declares, "Science is based on data supplied by a small corpus of knowledge. Perhaps it doesn't apply to all the rest that we don't know about, which is much more vast, and which we can never understand," it comes from Flaubert—or almost. When, with Pécuchet, he has reservations about the work of Walter Scott,

George Sand, or Balzac, that too is Flaubert—or almost.

Just as Cervantes at first presents Don Quixote as a ridiculous madman and then, in chapter 11, has him utter a beautiful tirade that expresses Cervantes's own thoughts, never ceasing afterwards to attend him with sympathy, thus Flaubert's opinion of his two "*bonshommes*," [fellows, characters] and even of the import of the book in general, changed as it developed—though there is always, at least throughout the first part (the part that seems almost entirely finished), ambiguity in Flaubert's attitude toward them. In "they considered themselves very serious individuals, occupied with useful pursuits," there is more irony, but as much benevolence, as in "their minds expanded. They were proud to reflect on such grand topics." They express commonplaces (noted by Demorest, p. 122)—and Flaubert formally attributes some of these to them, after their double defeat in love ("they repeated all the clichés to which women had given rise")—even while being shocked by the commonplaces of others, as when they invite the town notables or are invited in turn by the Count de Faverges. Then they explode, "What idiots! What baseness!"—just like Flaubert.

In the beginning, it was clearly his wish to strike a telling blow against human stupidity, a skinning alive of the catoblepas. "I hope to spit into it the gall that chokes me—that is, to speak some truths. By this means I hope to purge myself…this spewing-forth will take me several years… I would rather not go and see the dark shores until after having vomited the gall that chokes me…stupidity now crushes me so hard that I feel like a fly with the Himalayas on its back! No matter! I will try to vomit my venom into my book. This hope soothes me!" (Descharrnes, pp. 265ff).

If one is to believe René Descharmes (chapter 2), it was on Monday, August 19, 1872, in a letter to Mme. Roger des Genettes, that Flaubert, for the first time, made a precise allusion to his new work: "I am about to begin a book that will occupy me for several years." It is, he says, "the farcical story of those two characters who copy a kind of critical encyclopedia." He had finished *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* on June 20 (Descharrnes, p. 49). And it was on August 1, 1874, that he wrote the first sentence: "As the temperature that day had risen to ninety-two degrees, Boulevard Bourdon was completely deserted." (In the Charpentier and Conard editions, the temperature appears as a number; but in the manuscript (whose first page is reproduced in the Conard edition, p. 412), it is spelled out—which doesn't convey the same impression as the use of figures).

Noting the parallel between *Bouvard and Pécuchet* and *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* is obligatory—provoked by Flaubert himself, who, after having finished the *Temptation*, writes in one of his letters: "This summer I will begin another book of the same kind, after which I will return to the novel pure and simple," which shows moreover that *Bouvard and Pécuchet* is not a "pure and simple" novel. In fact it is an "encyclopedic" novel, as the *Temptation* is a "pantheonic" novel. Moreover, these are

works that are parallel to Flaubert's own life. Just as the *Temptation*—inspired in 1845 by the sight of Bruegel's *Temptation of Saint Anthony* at the Museum of Genoa, written in one year and revised several times—was not definitively completed until 1872, so the idea for *Bouvard and Pécuchet* goes back to a piece written in Flaubert's youth, almost in childhood, "A Lesson in Natural History," which appeared in the magazine *Le Colibri* in 1837. Maxime Du Camp claims that from 1843 on Flaubert was thinking of "the story of two clerks," and Maupassant claims that he spent half his life "meditating on that book."

As for the scenario itself of *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, it was borrowed, consciously or not, from a story by Barthélemy Maurice entitled "Les deux Greffiers" [The Two Court-Clerks], which had appeared on April 14, 1841, in the *Gazette des Tribunaux*, was reprinted in the *Journal des Journaux*, and published a third time on February 7, 1858, in *Audience*, a periodical edited by Flaubert's friend Eugene Delattre (Descharmes, p. 90). There we find two clerks, Andreas and Robert, who retire on pension. They look in the classified ads for a house to rent: "That's too high. That's too far north—wretched area—that's too close…that's too far from Paris." They envision going to the banks of the Loire—and talk just like Bouvard and Pécuchet. "We will see the steamboats pass—we'll be ruined by smoke." "We'll raise rabbits—that'll wreck everything." One would almost think one was reading the "Dictionary of Accepted Ideas": Steamboats: "fun to watch go by, but ruin everything with their smoke." Rabbits: "wreck everything." Finally they go set up in the country.

Robert goes hunting; and kills his dog. (At the beginning of chapter 7 of *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, after their first series of experiments—"Progress—what a joke! And politics is a fine mess"—they go through days that are "filled with gloom." Then "Pécuchet borrowed Langlois's punt gun to hunt meadowlarks; the explosion from the first shot nearly killed him"). Andreas goes fishing, and falls in the water. Then they decide to devote themselves to horticulture: "the day before, they read in secret, one the *Good Gardener*, the other the *Loiret Almanac* and Mathieu Laensberg's guidebook." But the gardener opposes their activity, which would make "their garden into a little Sologne." (Demorest, p. 52, has shown how the title of the dossier entitled *Notes for M. Gustave Flaubert. Mistakes That Can be Made by Two Parisians Who Want to Take up Agriculture* singularly clarifies the meaning of the failures of chapter 2. The hard times of Andreas and Robert are clearly those of two "Parisians.")

Then comes winter. What to do? Games bore them. So they go to copying. "Thus their last pleasure, their true, their sole pleasure was to resume, albeit fictitiously, that arid task which, for thirty-eight years, had been the occupation—and perhaps, without their knowledge, the happiness—of their lives."

In the original scenario (analyzed by Demorest, chapter 4), Bouvard and Pécuchet devote themselves to the fine arts. They study drawing and photography, and Pécuchet

poses nude. In this version, the *Odyssey* of the sciences does not begin until chapter 14; meanwhile Bouvard and Pécuchet go to Paris, where they frequent artists and admire the work of Haussmann, get tired of the different games and activities offered to the idle, etc. They are presented as people who've become bored rather than as adventurers in search of knowledge. In short, we are still quite close to Maurice's story.

Bouvard and Pécuchet are at first called Dubolard and Pécuchet, then Bolard and Manichet, before reaching their definitive baptism. (The novel itself was at first called "The Story of Two Nobodies [*cloportes*]," then "The Story of Two Characters [*bonshommes*].") The resemblance between the names *Bouvard* and *Bovary* is curiously accentuated by the fact that Flaubert had obtained "Bovary" by "distorting the name Bouvaret." Another connection to make between the "The Story of Two Nobodies" and *Madame Bovary* is Flaubert's *mot*, reported in the Goncourts' diaries, that in *Madame Bovary* he had wanted to write a book with "the color of those moldy cornices that harbor woodlice."*

As for the heroine, who is certainly less intelligent than Bouvard and his friend Pécuchet, she rushes into diverse enterprises—adultery, devoutness, and Italian grammar—with the same disregard of method and the same elementary offhandedness that, at first blush, we attribute to the two "nobodies."

If Madame Bovary is Flaubert, according to his own exclamation (fie! what an ugly commonplace!), it's no less obvious that he is also both Bouvard and Pécuchet. The necessity of his going with them through their encyclopedic *Odyssey* (Flaubert read, he says, *more than fifteen hundred volumes* toward this end) can only confirm this identification. Demorest picks up the following sentences from Flaubert's *Correspondence* (that I can do no better than pillage: see Demorest, p. 37): "Bouvard and Pécuchet have filled me up to such a point that I've become them! Their stupidity is my own and I am bursting with it." "I live as much as I can in my two fellows." "I am too full of my subject…the stupidity of my two characters has invaded me." (Compare with this sentence toward the end of chapter 8: "Then their minds developed a piteous faculty, that of perceiving stupidity and being unable to tolerate it.")

This *Odyssey* is punctuated by the following sentences:

"Maybe we just don't know enough about chemistry."

"Six months later they had become archeologists."

"Let's send for some historical novels."

"Mark my words, there's going to be havoc."

“Pécuchet, watching her, felt something utterly new, a charm, an infinite pleasure.”

“Pleased with their regimen, they decided to improve their constitutions with gymnastics.”

“And they felt something like daybreak rising in their souls.”

“They procured several books about education.”

“And with great excitement they set out across the village.”

“They set to it.”

Each of these sentences introduces a new theme, and each chapter has a clearly determined subject—even though, according to a note published by Demorest (p. 45), we see that Flaubert had thought momentarily of preventing the succession of studies and failures from being punctuated too mechanically by the chapter breaks. Nevertheless, in the novel as it has come to us, there is homogeneity within each division: chapter 2 is Agriculture; 3, the Natural Sciences; 4, Archeology and History; 5, Literature; 6, Politics; 7, Love; 8, Philosophy (and at first, Gymnastics); 9, Religion; 10, Pedagogy and Social Reforms; 11, Copying—chapters 4, 9, and 10 being announced in the preceding chapters, in conformity with the above-mentioned note, by, respectively: Gorgu’s chest, the Christmas Mass, and Victor and Victorine.

It is curious to note that, among the sciences Bouvard and Pécuchet undertake to study, mathematics is almost the only one not to appear. Yet one can very well see them trying to demonstrate Fermat’s theorem, stupefied by the assertion that a straight line is a curve, and finally scandalized by the distribution of prime numbers. In the infernal mythology of the classroom, the logarithmic table is considered the most dreadful of all monsters. This phobia testifies to a certain affectation: one can use the book without antipathy. It incites one to daydreaming far less than the railway timetable, the *Catalogue of the Saint-Etienne Arms and Bicycle Manufacture*, the *Annual Bulletin of the Bureau of Longitudes*, or the overseas business directory—all works that are dear to young Bouvard-and-Pécuchetians. Still, it is not without charm. The logarithmic table habitually used some twenty years ago and perhaps still in service today was the work of two gentlemen, one of whom was named Bouvart and the other Ratinet: it was inevitable that the authors of a similar production should have similar names. But for a *d* and a *pécuch*, they were going to set themselves to copy the entire sequence of whole numbers, pure and simple, writing the even numbers in red and the odd ones in blue.

The passage from one science (or "hobby") to the next is generally made in a logical fashion; but sometimes it is chance alone that sends Bouvard and Pécuchet on the trail to new investigations. Obviously one moves in a natural way from agriculture to arboriculture, then from that to horticulture, and from that to the art of the distiller and bromatology, and from that to chemistry, then to anatomy, then to physiology, then to medicine (here logic is reinforced by a bit of chance: the purchase of a Raspail manual from a hawker; but before this, there is an "empty month"), then to hygiene, then to the contemplation of Nature, then—after intervention from Dumouchel—to geology. Here, shipwreck. It would have been natural to make Bouvard and Pécuchet go from geology to history by way of paleontology and prehistory. No. Flaubert preferred chance: the discovery of the chest at Gorgu's. And so they become archeologists. Then they're interested in history, in the historical novel, in literature, in the dramatic art, in the art of writing. Here, another wreck. Events (1848) intervene. Politics and socialism, consequently, enter the domain of their preoccupations. Coup d'état. Here, chapter 7 (the shortest of all): the loves of Pécuchet and Mélie, of Bouvard and Mme. Bordin. The encyclopedic navigation resumes in chapter 8 with gymnastics; then dead calm, of short duration. Chance intervenes with Marescot's séance table and the coastal cruise resumes with spiritualism, hypnotism, magic, dowsing, philosophy (here the double coincidence of the carrion (probably recalling Baudelaire, as Maynial remarks) and of the Christmas Mass (certainly echoing Goethe; though in *Faust* the temptation of suicide is dissipated by the festival of Easter; nevertheless, Bouvard and Pécuchet are Faustian heroes, just like Saint Anthony). Then religion, the critique of same, pedagogy (a savage gulf that shelters a chaotic archipelago of sciences and arts: calculus, geography, cosmography, history—once again—drawing, botany, ethics, and music), and social reform. Then, they set themselves to copying.

We see, according to the outlines published by Demorest, that Bouvard and Pécuchet would have begun by copying anything, everything, even "tobacco packets, old newspapers, posters, torn-up books" ("…old-fashioned literature, church Latin, erotic books with bad spelling, novels of our grandmothers, fairy tales, little children's books, old operas, stupid refrains, naïve rhythms"). Then they would have begun to classify their riches. "But," says the outline, "they are often at pains to catalogue a fact in its correct place, have bouts of conscience." They establish "parallels," compare "beauties," etc. They discover "howlers," among others those of a certain Flaubert who, in *Madame Bovary*, talks of the perfume of syringas in the month of September (one of the first confidences of Pécuchet to Bouvard is that he has found historical errors in Thiers; later he also takes apart Alexandre Dumas and Walter Scott). Then they establish the "Dictionary of Accepted Ideas," a work that Flaubert had "completely finished" as of September 4, 1850. On September 17, 1852, he wrote to Louise Colet: "The preface [to the 'Dictionary'] in particular has me quite excited, and from the way I envision it, it

would be an entire book…" This book is none other than *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, whose eleventh chapter would have been equal in length to the first ten.

Finally Bouvard and Pécuchet would have stumbled upon the papers of Marescot's clerk, thus introducing a series of pastiches—notably, it seems, of epistolary literature—in order to lead to the discovery of Dr. Vaucorbeil's letter to the prefect: a "confidential report" on the activities of Bouvard and Pécuchet since their arrival in Chavignolles; and this letter, for the reader, was meant to be "a critique of the [entire] novel." But quite unmoved, exalting "statistics," "facts," and "phenomena," the two fellows would have continued to copy, in pure and seamless joy.

Thus they arrive safely in port, to live in the domain of maritime and Ulyssean images that I have slipped into the narration of their epic voyage. For *Bouvard and Pécuchet* is an *Odyssey*; Mme. Bordin and Mélie are the Calypsos of this ramble through the Mediterranean of knowledge; and the final copy is the Ithaca, where, after having massacred all the suitors, they engage, enthusiastically and filled with wisdom, in breeding the pearl oysters of human stupidity. Just like Candide, they cultivate their garden—and, as Flaubert says in a letter to Edmond de Goncourt, "The end of *Candide*—'let us cultivate our garden'—is the greatest moral lesson that exists."

Literature (profane—that is to say, real—literature) begins with Homer (already a great skeptic), and every great work that follows is either an *Iliad* or an *Odyssey*, the *Odyssey*s being much more numerous than the *Iliad*s. The *Satyricon*, *The Divine Comedy*, *Pantagruel*, *Don Quixote*, and, naturally, *Ulysses* (in which, moreover, we recognize the direct influence of *Bouvard and Pécuchet*) are *Odyssey*s—that is, accounts of fulfilled time. The *Iliad*s, on the contrary, are searches for lost time—before Troy, on a desert island, or at the home of the Guermantes. But, rich or empty, time in epics is not susceptible to being organized according to the precise chronology of "pure and simple" novels. In chapter 3 of his book, Descharmes shows that, from the point of view of verisimilitude, Bouvard and Pécuchet would have to be about eighty-five years old when they begin to copy—whereas if we rely on the data provided by Flaubert, they would be only seventy: their meeting is situated in July or August 1838 (they are forty-seven) and, in chapter 10, reference is made to the "topic of free trade," hence 1861. But in both cases the improbability is equal; indeed, their youthful spirit, their vitality, their perfect health show that Bouvard and Pécuchet are no more old men "pure and simple" than the novel that bears their names.

How could "a farcical critical encyclopedia," "a review of all the sciences as they appeared to two rather lucid, mediocre, and simple minds," "a review of all modern thinking," be a novel "pure and simple"? "What a book!" cries Flaubert. "At certain moments, this book amazes me by its immense scope." "A far-reaching work." "Terrific book." "Frightening book."

A letter of Flaubert's of December 16, 1879, indicates that *Bouvard and Pécuchet*

would have had as a subtitle "On the Lack of Method in the Sciences" (an unusual theme for a work seemingly in the form of a novel, but don't great novels often have quite singular subjects—a sulking general, the misadventures of a Leibnizian philosopher, a crook who has troubles with his phallus, a man-about-town who munches a madeleine, etc.?).

In his manuscript notes, we find the following indication from Flaubert: "Sometimes, the book indicates several methods. Terrible anguish." This, indeed, is what happens in arboriculture: after having learnt the advantages of pruning, Bouvard and Pécuchet go on to read that trees "that are never pruned or manured produce better fruit—smaller, maybe, but more flavorful." Pécuchet then exclaims, "I demand that someone tell me why that is! And it's not just each variety that requires specific care, but each individual tree, depending on the climate, the temperature, and God knows what else! So then, where's the rule?" And after some other considerations, he exclaims, "Fruit farming might just be a joke." "Like agronomy," replies Bouvard. The same thing happens when they approach grammar: grammarians "admitted principles but ignored the consequences, proclaimed consequences but refused the principles, leaned on tradition but rejected the masters, and came up with bizarre refinements." After having cited some examples, Flaubert writes: "They concluded that syntax was a fantasy and grammar an illusion." Much later, they find a similar scandal in botany: "Really, now! If even the exceptions weren't true [that is, have exceptions themselves], what *could* you trust?" (It is in this connection that, "in reality," Flaubert triumphs over vulgar botanists without scientific conscience [Demorest, pp. 57–58]: "the aesthetic is the true, and…to a certain intellectual degree [when one is methodical], one doesn't fool oneself. Reality does not at all yield to the ideal, but confirms it"). Sometimes they get exasperated for reasons that are not very sound; for example, when they "started having doubts about the microscope" because they do not know how to use it. But most often their despair, their disgust, and their lassitude originate in the confrontation of contradictory opinions, in agriculture ("When it came to marl, for instance, Puvis recommended it, the Roret manual was steadfastly against it. As for gypsum, despite Franklin's example, Rieffel and Mr. Rigaud seemed less than enthusiastic") as well as in hygiene ("A glass of wine after soup was considered excellent on the stomach. Lévy accused it of ruining the teeth," "One does not go swimming in the sea without having first cooled one's skin. Bégin recommended jumping in while bathed in perspiration") or in history ("dates are not always accurate," "Having stopped caring about dates, they moved on to disdaining facts"). Here, the intellectual position of Bouvard and Pécuchet is clear: they are in love with the absolute and cannot bear contradictions. They believe in the absolute validity of the functioning of the human mind confronted with phenomena. Approaching aesthetics, Bouvard "strove to make the doctrines agree with the works and the critics with the poets, to seize the essence of the beautiful… He developed jaundice." When at

last they delve into philosophy, it becomes frightful: “His need for truth became an insatiable thirst. Swayed by Bouvard’s speeches, he abandoned spiritualism, took it up again only to abandon it anew, and cried out with his head in his hands, ‘Oh! This doubt! This doubt! I’d rather have nothingness!’”

In the last chapter written by Flaubert, concerning pedagogy, we see the error of learning multiplied by the error of teaching. One of Flaubert’s notes says precisely that this last experience represents the “*summa* of their studies.” And of this chapter he writes: “as for the scope of these pages, I have no doubt of it.” To Guy de Maupassant, who was working at the Bibliothèque de l’Instruction Publique, he wrote, “I would need things that are characteristic of programs of study and method. I want to show that education, no matter what it is, does not signify much, and that nature does everything, or almost everything.” Here, as Demorest points out, he indicates the double meaning of the book: for if it shows the dangers of a lack of method in the sciences, it also seeks occasionally to show the uselessness of all method. In short, the problem is this: how can two men of good will, faced with the problem of knowledge, resolve their anxiety? In the *Temptation*, the lugubrious and unhealthy parade of religious beliefs ends in a Spinoza-like profession of faith. But between the *Temptation* and *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, Flaubert read Spencer; and *Bouvard and Pécuchet* ends with a “skeptical” conclusion—in the sense in which skepticism and science are identical. And in this sense, *Bouvard and Pécuchet* is comparable to the *Adversus Mathematicos* of Sextus Empiricus, which successively puts to death not grammar, rhetoric, etc., but the pretensions of grammarians, rhetoricians, geometers, arithmeticians, astronomers, musicians, logicians, physicians, and moralists. Flaubert is in favor of science exactly to the degree that it is skeptical, reserved, methodical, prudent, and humane. He has a horror of dogmatists, metaphysicians, philosophers. To read them plunges him into a great “gloom”: “This parade of absurdities is truly saddening.” Apropos of the readings he must do in theology, he cries: “What a pile of stupidity! What impudence! What makes me most indignant are those who have the good Lord in their pocket and explain the incomprehensible to you by means of the absurd. What a case of pride any dogma is.” And in a letter of November 1879: “I am not surprised at those who seek to explain the incomprehensible, but at those who believe they have found the explanation, those who have the good Lord (or the non-Lord) in their pocket. Well, yes! Every dogmatist exasperates me. In short, materialism and spiritualism seem to me to be two impertinences. Having lately read not a few Catholic books, I took up the philosophy of Lefevre (‘the last word on science’): it should be thrown into the latrines. That’s my opinion. All ignoramuses, all charlatans, all idiots, who only ever see one side of a whole.”

Moreover, Flaubert’s skepticism is far-reaching. Demorest picks up the following note: “Excellent causes defended by bad reasons. Premises may be defective and the

conclusions (in practice) marvelous." And in *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, it's a question of a "a pernicious approach, but [one that] * An infinite sequence of numbers that does not approach a limit.—*Trans.* worked," somewhat as the astronomers had, for a long time, used divergent series* without having any idea that they were such (and continued to use them, even after the work of Poincaré demonstrated this divergence—they were encouraged, Borel tells us, "by the exactitude of the results obtained, which wholly conformed to their observations"). There is in *Bouvard and Pécuchet* the signs of a kind of pragmatism—and the famous "stupidity" of our two heroes has no other origin than their desire for the absolute, which they believe they can satisfy with manuals and superficial studies; they do not become wise (and do not completely become one with their creator) until they compile their "Album" and their "Dictionary," and stop aiming at a final conclusion. This is what I believe I have found in a letter from Flaubert to Bouilhet, of September 4, 1850, a letter which seems to me to be the best possible preface to the book that, thirty years later, death prevented him from finishing:

> You do well to think about the "Dictionary of Accepted Ideas." This book, completely finished and preceded by a good preface where we would indicate how the work has been written to reconnect the public to tradition, to order, to general convention, and arranged in such a manner that the reader is not to know whether or not he is being played for a fool—that would perhaps be a strange book, but capable of succeeding, for it would be entirely topical. If, in 1852, there isn't an enormous catastrophe occasioned by the election of the president, if the bourgeois triumph at last, it's possible that we'll be set up for a century. Then, weary of politics, the public mind will perhaps want literary distractions. There would be a reaction against deeds and towards dreams: that would be our day! If, on the contrary, we are precipitated into the future, who knows what sort of poetry will arise from that?
>
> Why not be satisfied with the goal we have been handed? It's as good as any other. To consider things impartially, there are few that are more fertile. Ineptitude consists in wanting to conclude. We tell each other: but our base is not fixed; which of the two will be right? I see a past in ruins and a future in embryo; the one is too old, the other too young. Everything is in a state of confusion. But this means wanting only noon or midnight; it means not understanding twilight…
>
> Yes, stupidity consists in wanting to conclude. We are a thread and we want to know the pattern. That goes back to those eternal discussions about the decadence of art. Now one spends one's time telling oneself: we are completely finished, here we are at the very end, etc., etc. What mind of any strength—beginning with Homer—has ever come to a conclusion?

…Homer, O father of all literature and of all skepticism, and great-great-great-great…great-grandfather of Bouvard and Pécuchet.

1950
translated by Richard R. Crowder

Bouvard and Pécuchet

One

As the temperature that day had risen to ninety-two degrees, Boulevard Bourdon was completely deserted. Lower down, the Canal Saint-Martin, contained by a lock at each end, stretched its inky water in a straight line. In the middle was a barge loaded with wood, and on the bank were twin rows of barrels.

Past the canal, between buildings buttressed by scaffolding, emerged patches of clear blue sky, and beneath the sun's rays the white facades, slate roofs, and granite quays shone brilliantly. An indistinct murmur rose far off in the sultry atmosphere, and everything seemed muted by the Sunday quiet, the melancholy of summer afternoons.

Two men appeared.

One was coming from the Bastille, the other from the Jardin des Plantes. The taller one, wearing a linen suit, walked with his hat pushed back, vest unbuttoned and tie in his hand. The shorter one, whose body disappeared inside a brown frock coat, lowered his head beneath a cap with a pointed visor.

When they reached the middle of the boulevard, they both sat down, at the same moment, on the same bench.

To wipe their foreheads, they removed their hats, which each man placed next to him. The short man noticed the name *Bouvard* written in his neighbor's, while the latter made out the word *Pécuchet* in the cap belonging to the fellow in the coat.

"Fancy that!" he said. "We both had the idea of writing our names in our hats."

"I should say so! Someone could walk off with mine at the office!"

"You don't say—I work in an office, too."

At which point they looked at each other.

Pécuchet was immediately charmed by Bouvard's friendly appearance. His bluish, heavy-lidded eyes smiled in his florid face. His trousers, which puckered at the cuff over buckskin shoes, had a wide flap in front that molded his stomach and caused his shirt to puff out at the belt line; and his blond hair, waving into soft curls, made him look like an overgrown child. His lips gave off a kind of low, continual whistle.

Bouvard was struck by Pécuchet's serious demeanor. He seemed to be wearing a wig, so flat and black was the hair covering his high skull. His long nose made his face seem in constant profile. His legs, encased in twill stovepipes, were disproportionate to the length of his torso, and he had a strong, cavernous voice.

He let out a sigh: "It would be so much nicer in the country!"

But according to Bouvard, the suburbs were impossible because of all the noise from the dance halls. Pécuchet felt the same way. Still, he was getting tired of the capital; Bouvard too.

And their eyes wandered over the heaps of paving stones, the hideous water in which a bundle of straw was floating, the smokestack of a factory rising up from the horizon. The sewers gave off a fetid stench. When they turned around, they saw only the walls of the municipal granary.

All things considered (and Pécuchet found this surprising), it was hotter in the streets than at home. Bouvard encouraged him to remove his coat. Personally, he couldn't care less what people thought!

Suddenly a drunk zigzagged across the sidewalk; and, from the topic of laborers, they launched into a discussion of politics. They were of the same opinion, though Bouvard was perhaps a bit more liberal.

A clanking noise rang out on the cobblestones in a cloud of dust: it was three hackney cabs heading toward Bercy, carrying a bride with her bouquet, some bourgeois in white tie, ladies sunk to the armpits in their skirts, two or three little girls, and a student. The sight of this wedding led Bouvard and Pécuchet to talk of women, whom they declared to be frivolous, shrewish, and stubborn. That being said, they were often better than men; at other times they seemed worse. In short, you were better off living without them. Pécuchet, for his part, had remained a bachelor.

"I'm a widower, myself," said Bouvard. "No children."

"Perhaps that's just as well." Ultimately, though, living alone could get rather depressing.

Then, at the edge of the quay, a prostitute appeared with a soldier. Ashen-faced, dark-haired, and pitted with smallpox, she was leaning on the military man's arm, dragging her worn-out heels and swinging her hips. When she had passed by, Bouvard made a smutty remark. Pécuchet turned beet-red, and no doubt to avoid answering he glanced pointedly at a priest who was coming their way.

The clergyman slowly walked down the avenue of thin elms lining the sidewalk, and Bouvard expressed relief once the man's tricorn hat was no longer in sight, for he despised Jesuits. Pécuchet, without quite absolving them, showed some deference for religion.

Meanwhile, dusk was beginning to fall, and some window blinds facing them had been raised. The passersby increased in number. Seven o'clock sounded.

Their words flowed tirelessly, remarks following upon anecdotes, philosophical musings upon personal observations. They denigrated the Public Works department, the Tobacco Authority, business, the theater, our Navy, and the entire human race, like men who had suffered grave disappointments. Each one, listening to the other, rediscovered forgotten parts of himself. And although they had passed the age of naïve emotions,

they both felt a new pleasure, a kind of blossoming, the charm of affections newly born.

Twenty times they had stood up, sat down again, and had walked the length of the boulevard from upstream lock to downstream, each time meaning to take their leave but unable to, retained by a kind of fascination.

They had nonetheless shaken hands and were about to part company when Bouvard blurted out, "How about having dinner together?"

"I was thinking the same thing!" answered Pécuchet. "But I didn't dare suggest it."

And he let himself be led to a cozy little restaurant opposite the town hall. Bouvard asked for the menu.

Pécuchet shied away from spices as if they would set his body on fire. This became the subject of a medical discussion. After which, they praised the advances of science: so many things to know, so much research—if only one had the time! Alas, one's livelihood absorbed it all. Their arms flew up in amazement and they nearly hugged each other across the table when they discovered that they were both copy-clerks, Bouvard in a business office, Pécuchet at the Naval Ministry—which didn't keep him from devoting a few moments to his studies every evening. He had noted some errors in Mr. Thiers's book, and spoke with the highest respect of a certain Professor Dumouchel.

Bouvard had the advantage in other respects. His horsehair watch chain and the way he stirred the remoulade sauce bespoke an experienced man of the world, and while he ate, the corner of his napkin tucked under his armpit, he spouted forth observations that made Pécuchet laugh. It was a peculiar laugh, a single low note, always the same, emitted at long intervals. Bouvard's was continuous and resonant and uncovered his teeth; it made his shoulders shake and the patrons near the door turn around.

When the meal was over, they went somewhere else for coffee. Pécuchet, glancing at the gaslights, deplored the conspicuous luxury, then offhandedly dismissed the newspapers. Bouvard was more indulgent: he liked writers in general and in his youth had leaned toward becoming an actor.

He tried to do balancing tricks with a billiard cue and two ivory balls, like his friend Barberou. They invariably fell to the floor and rolled away, getting lost among people's legs. The waiter, who got up each time to go fetch them on all fours, ended up complaining. Pécuchet quarreled with him, and when the owner appeared he ignored his pleas and even quibbled over the bill. He then suggested they finish their evening peacefully at his place, which was just a short walk away on Rue Saint-Martin.

No sooner had they entered than Pécuchet put on a kind of print flannel nightshirt, then showed Bouvard around his apartment. The corners of a pine desk, placed in the center of the room, made it difficult to circulate. And all around in haphazard piles—on shelves, on the three chairs, on the old couch, and in the corners—were several volumes of the Roret Encyclopedia, the *Hypnotist's Manual*, something by Fénéon, and other books, along with stacks of papers, two coconuts, various medallions, a fez, and shells

brought back from Le Havre by Dumouchel. A coating of dust gave a velvety finish to the walls, which had once been painted yellow. A shoe brush was lying at the foot of the bed, whose sheets hung to the floor. On the ceiling one could see a large black stain produced by smoke from the lamp.

Bouvard, no doubt because of the smell, asked if he could open a window.

"My papers will blow all over the place!" cried Pécuchet, who was also afraid of drafts. Still, he was panting in that little room, heated since morning by the slate roofing.

Bouvard said, "If I were you, I'd take off that flannel."

"What!" Pécuchet hung his head, terrified at the idea of being without his protective wrap.

"Walk me home," Bouvard proposed. "The fresh air will make you feel cooler."

Finally Pécuchet put his boots back on, grumbling, "I swear, you're a regular sorcerer!" And despite the distance he accompanied his new friend all the way home, which was at the corner of Rue de Béthune, facing the Pont de la Tournelle.

Bouvard's room was well scrubbed and had percale curtains, walnut furniture, and a balcony with a view of the river. The two main decorations were a liqueur service in the middle of the sideboard and daguerreotypes of friends lined up along the mirror. An oil painting hung over the alcove.

"My uncle!" said Bouvard. And the candle in his hand lit a gentleman's features.

Red whiskers widened his face, crowned by a head of hair that frizzed into a point. He was ensconced in a high cravat, a shirt with a triple collar, a velvet vest, and a black coat. Diamonds had been painted on his jabot. His eyes were slanted at the cheeks, and his smile looked vaguely sardonic.

Pécuchet couldn't help remarking, "That could be your father!"

"He's my godfather," Bouvard replied offhandedly, adding that he had been baptized François Denys Bartholomée. Pécuchet's given names were Juste Romain Cyrille. They were even the same age, forty-seven. This coincidence pleased them, but also surprised them: each had thought the other somewhat older. Afterward they spoke admiringly of Providence, which sometimes worked in such marvelous ways.

"For if we hadn't gone out earlier to take a walk, we might have died without ever meeting!"

And, having exchanged their work addresses, they bid each other goodnight.

"Don't go chasing the ladies, now!" Bouvard shouted down the stairwell.

Pécuchet continued down the steps without answering the off-color remark.

The next day, in the courtyard of Descambos Bros., Alsatian fabrics, 92 Rue Hautefeuille, a voice called out, "Bouvard! Monsieur Bouvard!"

The latter poked his head around the glass tiles and recognized Pécuchet, who said more loudly: "I'm not sick! I took it off!"

"What's that?"

"This!" said Pécuchet, pointing to his chest.

The previous day's talk, along with the temperature in the apartment and the labors of digestion, had prevented him from sleeping—until, unable to stand it any longer, he had removed his nightshirt and flung it aside. In the morning he remembered what he'd done, saw that there had been no ill effects, and had come to notify Bouvard, who as a result had risen to even greater heights in his esteem.

Pécuchet was the son of a small shopkeeper and had never known his mother, who died very young. At fifteen, they had taken him out of boarding school to place him in a real estate office. The police arrived one day and carted his boss off to prison, a terrible episode that still filled him with horror. After that, he had tried out several occupations: student of pharmacology, schoolteacher, and accountant on a steamship on the Upper Seine. Finally, a division chief, taken with his handwriting, had hired him as an administrative copy-clerk. But his awareness of his own sporadic education and intellectual shortcomings darkened his mood, so that he lived completely alone, having neither parents nor a mistress. His one diversion was his Sunday outings to inspect public works projects.

Bouvard's earliest memories carried him back to a farm on the banks of the Loire. A man, his uncle, had brought him to Paris to teach him business. When he came of age he was given several thousand francs, and with this he took a wife and opened a confectioner's shop. Six months later, his bride disappeared along with the cash box. Friends, high living, and especially laziness had hastened his ruin. But he had the inspiration to use his beautiful penmanship, and so for the last twelve years he had held the same job, at Descambos Bros., fabrics, 92 Rue Hautefeuille. As for his uncle, who years ago had sent him the famous portrait as a souvenir, Bouvard did not even know his whereabouts and he no longer expected anything from him. Fifteen hundred pounds in annuities and his wages as a copy-clerk afforded him the opportunity to doze off every evening in a cheap tavern.

Their meeting, then, took on the significance of a great adventure. From the start, they were bound to each other by hidden threads. Besides, how can we explain why any two people hit it off? Why is a certain peculiarity, a certain imperfection, indifferent or baneful in one person but enchanting in someone else? What we call "love at first sight" holds true for all sorts of passions. By the end of the week, they were calling each other by their first names.

Often they went to meet each other at work. The moment one appeared, the other shut his desk, and off they went together to roam the streets. Bouvard advanced with huge strides, while Pécuchet, multiplying his steps, his frock coat beating against his heels, seemed to be gliding on rollers. In the same way, their personal tastes were complementary. Bouvard smoked a pipe, was fond of cheese, and had his espresso daily.

Pécuchet took snuff, had only a bit of preserves for dessert, and dipped a cube of sugar into his coffee. One was confident, rash, generous; the other discreet, pensive, frugal.

As a friendly gesture, Bouvard offered to introduce Pécuchet to Barberou. The latter was a former traveling salesman, now a stockbroker, very good-natured, a patriot and ladies' man, who affected popular slang in his speech. Pécuchet found him irritating and took Bouvard to see Dumouchel. This author (for he had published a brief mnemonic) taught literature in a primary school, had orthodox opinions, and dressed conservatively. He bored Bouvard to tears.

Neither had concealed his opinion from the other. Each one recognized its merits. Their habits changed and, forgoing their usual boarding-house meals, they ended up eating together every day.

They commented on the fashionable plays of the moment, the government, the price of food, business scandals. From time to time, the Diamond Necklace affair or the Fualdès trial surfaced in their conversation; then they debated the causes of the Revolution.

They strolled by junk shops. They visited the Arts and Crafts Conservatory, Saint-Denis church, the Gobelins tapestry mill, the Invalides, and all the public museums. When asked for their identification papers, they pretended to have lost them, claiming to be two foreigners, two Englishmen.

In the galleries of the Natural History Museum, they passed in astonishment before the stuffed quadrupeds, in pleasure before the butterflies, in indifference before the metals. The fossils set them dreaming; conchology bored them. They examined the hothouses through the glass, and shuddered to think that all those leaves distilled poisons. What they admired most about the cedar tree was that it had been transported there in a hat.

At the Louvre, they did their best to admire Raphael. At the national library, they wanted to know the exact number of volumes.

Once they wandered into a course on Arabic at the Collège de France, and the professor was astounded to see those two strangers struggling to take notes. Thanks to Barberou, they were admitted backstage at a small theater. Dumouchel got them tickets to a session of the Académie Française. They learned about discoveries, read prospectuses, and their newfound curiosity caused their intelligence to bloom. On a horizon that receded further each day, they glimpsed things at once strange and wondrous.

Admiring an old piece of furniture, they regretted not having lived at the time when it was used, even though they knew absolutely nothing about the period. Certain names evoked images of countries that were all the more beautiful in that they could say nothing specific about them. Books whose titles were unintelligible to them seemed to contain untold mysteries.

And, having more ideas, they suffered more acutely. When a mail coach passed by in the street, they felt an urge to leave with it. The flower stalls of the Quai aux Fleurs made them long for the countryside.

One Sunday they set out early in the morning and, passing through Meudon, Bellevue, Suresnes, and Auteuil, they spent the entire day roaming on foot among the vineyards, picking poppies at the edge of fields, drinking fresh milk, eating beneath the acacias of country inns; they returned home very late, dusty, exhausted, and delighted. They took many more such walks, but felt so sad the next day that they finally gave them up.

The monotony of office life became odious. Always the scraper and pounce, the same inkwell, the same pens and office mates! Deeming the latter to be stupid, they spoke to them less and less, which earned them some teasing. Every day they arrived late and were reprimanded.

Once they had almost been happy. But their trade humiliated them now that they held themselves in higher esteem, and they goaded each other on in their disgust, flattered each other, spoiled each other. Pécuchet adopted Bouvard's abruptness. Bouvard took on some of Pécuchet's moroseness.

"I'd rather be a juggler in the town square!" said one.

"You might as well be a ragman!" cried the other.

What an abominable situation! And not even the hope of escaping!

One afternoon (it was January 20, 1839), Bouvard received a letter at his desk, hand-delivered by the mailman.

His arms rose in the air, his head slowly fell back, and he dropped to the floor in a dead faint.

The salesmen came running; someone removed his tie. They went out to fetch a doctor. He opened his eyes, and to the questions they asked him: "Ah!…it's just that… it's that…a little fresh air is all I need. No! Leave me be! Let me up!"

And despite his corpulence, he ran without stopping all the way to the Naval Ministry, wiping his hand over his forehead, thinking he was going crazy, trying to calm down.

He asked to see Pécuchet. Pécuchet appeared.

"My uncle is dead! I'm going to inherit!"

"You can't be serious!"

Bouvard showed him the following letter:

FROM THE OFFICE OF
Maître TARDIVEL

NOTARY PUBLIC

Savigny-en-Septaine, January 14th, 1839

Dear Sir:

Kindly come to my office for the reading of the last will and testament of your natural father, the late Mr. François Denys Bartholomée Bouvard, merchant in the city of Nantes, who passed away in said municipality on the 10th of the present month. This will contains a very significant disposition in your favor.

With sincere respects,

TARDIVEL, *notary.*

Pécuchet had to sit down on a stone marker in the courtyard. Then he handed back the letter, saying slowly, "As long as it's not…some kind of prank."

"A prank! You think it's a prank!" answered Bouvard in a voice that sounded like a death rattle.

But the official stamp, the printed letterhead, the notary's signature—all seemed to prove the document's authenticity. And they looked at each other with the corners of their mouths trembling and a tear rolling in their staring eyes.

They needed to move. They walked as far as the Arc de Triomphe, came back via the banks of the Seine, passed by Notre-Dame. Bouvard's face was bright red. He gave Pécuchet little punches in the back and was completely delirious for five minutes.

They snickered in spite of themselves. This inheritance must have been fairly large. "Oh, that would be too good! Let's not talk about it."

They talked about it. Nothing prevented them from asking for details right away. Bouvard wrote to the notary.

The notary sent a copy of the will, which concluded as follows: "Therefore, I bequeath to François Denys Bartholomée Bouvard, my recognized natural son, the portion of my estate permitted by law."

The man had sired this son in his youth, but had carefully kept him at a distance, passing him off as his nephew; the nephew had always called him "Uncle," though he knew what was what. At around forty, Mr. Bouvard had married, then become a widower. His two legitimate sons having turned out to be disappointments, he had been seized by remorse over the abandonment of his other offspring after so many years. He would even have had Bouvard come live with him, were it not for his housekeeper's influence. His family finally maneuvered her out the door and, in his isolation, near death, he had wanted to repair his misdeeds by bequeathing as much of his fortune as possible to the fruit of his first love affair. This fortune was valued at half a million, which for the copy-clerk meant two hundred fifty thousand francs. The elder of his brothers, Mr. Etienne, had announced that he would abide by the will.

Bouvard fell into a kind of stupor. He kept repeating in a whisper, smiling the

peaceful smile of a drunkard: “Fifteen thousand pounds a year!”—and Pécuchet, though he had a cooler head, couldn’t get over it either.

They were given a rude shock by a further letter from Tardivel. The other son, Mr. Alexandre, had declared his intention of taking the matter to court, and even of contesting the will if he could; he began by demanding seals, inventories, the nomination of an interim custodian, and so forth! Bouvard suffered a bilious fit. No sooner had he recovered than he left for Savigny, from whence he returned without a resolution of any kind and bemoaning his travel costs.

Then came bouts of insomnia, swings between anger and hope, elation and despondency. Finally, after six months, young Alexandre let the matter drop and Bouvard entered into possession of the inheritance.

His first exclamation was, “We are going to retire to the country!” And this statement, which included his friend in his good fortune, struck Pécuchet as beautiful in its simplicity. For the union of these two men was deep and absolute.

But as he had no desire to live off of Bouvard, he would not leave before he had earned his retirement pension. Only two more years. Not so long! He remained inflexible and the matter was settled.

In deciding where to move, they considered all the provinces one by one. The North was fertile, but too cold; the South had an enchanting climate, but the mosquitoes made it unbearable; and the Center, frankly, was utterly devoid of interest. Brittany would have suited them fine, if not for the sanctimoniousness of the locals. As for the eastern regions with their Germanic dialects, not a chance. But there were other areas. What, for instance, were the Forez, the Bugey, or the Roumois like? The geographical maps gave no clue. Anyway, regardless of which region their house was in, the main thing was that they would have one.

Already they pictured themselves in shirtsleeves at the edge of a flowerbed, pruning rose bushes, hoeing, harrowing, handling the earth, transplanting tulips. They would awake with the meadowlark’s song to follow the plows, would go with their basket to pick apples, watch butter being churned, grain being threshed, sheep being shorn, beehives being cared for, and would delight in the lowing of cows and the aroma of fresh-cut hay. No more writing! No more bosses! Not even rent to pay! For they would own a house of their own! And they would eat chickens from their own farmyard, vegetables from their garden—and would dine with their clogs still on! “We’ll do whatever we please! We’ll let our beards grow!”

They bought horticultural instruments, plus a load of other things “that might come in handy,” such as a tool box (every house should have one), scales, a surveyor’s chain, a bathtub in case they became ill, a thermometer, and even a barometer (“Gay-Lussac system”) for physics experiments should the spirit move them. Nor would it be a bad idea, since you can’t always work outdoors, to bring along several good literary works—

and they went in search of some, often at a loss to tell if a given book "was really worthy of the library."

Bouvard settled the matter: "Bah! We won't need a library."

"Anyway, we already have mine," said Pécuchet.

They made their arrangements in advance. Bouvard would take his furniture, Pécuchet his large black table. They would reuse the curtains, and that plus a few kitchen utensils would be quite enough.

They had sworn to keep the whole thing to themselves, but their faces glowed and their colleagues found them rather odd. Bouvard, who always wrote splayed over his desk, his elbows jutting out the better to slant his cursive, gave off his strange whistle while batting his heavy eyelids with a crafty air. Pécuchet, perched on a tall straw stool, still took great care with the downstrokes of his long penmanship, but swelled his nostrils and pursed his lips as if afraid of blurting out his secret.

After eighteen months of searching, they still hadn't found anything. They traveled throughout the areas surrounding Paris, from Amiens to Evreux, and from Fontainebleau all the way to Le Havre. They wanted countryside that was real countryside. It didn't have to be anything too picturesque, but at the same time a blocked horizon made them sad. They avoided houses in close proximity but dreaded solitude.

At times they had almost reached a decision; then, fearing they would regret it later, changed their minds, the chosen place striking them as unwholesome, or exposed to the sea winds, or too near a factory, or difficult to reach.

It was Barberou who came to their rescue.

He knew of their dream, and one fine day dropped by to tell them that he'd heard of a place in Chavignolles, between Caen and Falaise. It consisted of a farm with thirty-eight hectares, a kind of manor house, and fields that boasted a good yield.

They headed straightaway to the Calvados region and were enchanted. Only, for both the farm and the house (one would not be sold without the other), the seller was asking one hundred forty-three thousand francs. Bouvard would offer only one hundred twenty.

Pécuchet fought against his obstinacy, begged him to give in, and finally stated that he would make up the difference. It was his entire fortune, consisting of his mother's estate and his own savings. He had never breathed a word about it, reserving this nest egg for a major occasion.

The final payment was made toward the end of 1840, six months before his retirement.

Bouvard was no longer a copy-clerk. At first he had continued his functions out of mistrust for the future, but had resigned once he was certain of the inheritance. Still, he gladly returned to visit Descambos Bros., and on the eve of his departure he bought a

round of punch for the entire branch.

Pécuchet, on the other hand, was surly toward his colleagues, and on his last day he stalked out, slamming the door behind him.

He still had to oversee the packing, run a heap of errands, do some more shopping, and say goodbye to Dumouchel!

The academic suggested they maintain a correspondence, in which he would keep him abreast of literary developments; he congratulated him again and wished him good luck. Barberou reacted more emotively to Bouvard's farewell. He abandoned a game of dominos, promised to come see him out there, ordered two anisettes, and gave him a hug.

Bouvard, back at home on his balcony, drew in a large breath of air and thought, "Finally." The lights of the quays trembled in the water, the rumbling of buses faded in the distance. He remembered happy days spent in that great city, lunches at restaurants, evenings at the theater, his landlady's gossip, all his old habits; and he felt a faintness in his heart, a sadness that he didn't dare admit to himself.

Pécuchet paced around his room until two in the morning. Never again would he return here—so much the better! Still, to leave something of himself behind, he carved his name into the plaster above the fireplace.

The largest trunks had already left the day before. The gardening implements, bunks, mattresses, tables, chairs, a heater, the bathtub, and three barrels of Burgundy would be transported via the Seine up to Le Havre, and from there would be shipped to Caen, where Bouvard, awaiting their arrival, would have them brought to Chavignolles. But his father's portrait, the armchairs, the wine cellar, the books, the grandfather clock, and all the precious objects were loaded into a moving van that would travel via Nonancourt, Verneuil, and Falaise. Pécuchet wanted to ride with it.

He settled in next to the driver on the bench, covered in his oldest frock coat, a muffler, mittens, and his office foot-muff; and at daybreak on Sunday, March 20, he set out from the capital.

The movement and the newness of the journey occupied him for the first few hours. Then the horses slowed, which led to arguments with the driver and the carter. They chose revolting inns and, even though they guaranteed everything, Pécuchet, out of excessive caution, slept in the same lodgings. The next morning they left at dawn; and the road, always the same, rose unendingly toward the horizon. Yards of gravel followed each other, the ditches were full of water, the countryside stretched in large surfaces of cold and monotonous green, clouds chased each other across the sky, some rain fell now and then. On the third day, the wind rose. The chariot's poorly secured tarpaulin snapped in the gusts like the sail of a ship. Pécuchet lowered his face beneath his cap, and every time he opened his tobacco pouch he had to turn away to safeguard his eyes. With every bump in the road he heard his luggage rattling behind him, and redoubled

his recommendations. Seeing that they got him nowhere, he changed tactics. He acted easygoing, went out of his way to be accommodating; on the steep climbs, he shouldered the wheel with the men; he even bought their after-dinner schnapps. From then on, they rolled more speedily, so much so that around Gauburge the axle broke and the wagon sat at a tilt. Pécuchet immediately went to inspect the inside of the van: the porcelain cups lay in shards. He threw up his arms, gnashing his teeth, and cursed the two imbeciles; and the next day was wasted because the carter got drunk. But he no longer had the strength to complain, his cup of bitterness having run over.

Bouvard had left Paris a full two days later to dine one more time with Barberou. He made it to the depot at the last minute, then awoke to find himself staring at the Rouen cathedral: he had taken the wrong coach. All the seats for Caen that evening were reserved. With nothing better to do, he went to the Théâtre des Arts, where he smiled at his neighbors, telling all and sundry that he had retired from business and had recently acquired a property in the region. When he disembarked in Caen on Friday, his packages hadn't arrived. He received them on Sunday and sent them off on a cart, having notified the farmer that he'd be following several hours later.

In Falaise, on the ninth day of his journey, Pécuchet got a fresh horse, and until dusk they rolled smoothly. Past Bretteville, having left the main road, they veered onto a cross path, expecting at any moment to see the rooftops of Chavignolles. But the ruts became scarcer, then disappeared altogether, and they found themselves in the middle of plowed fields. Night was falling. What would become of them? Finally, Pécuchet abandoned the wagon and, squelching through the mud, groped his way forward. When he neared a farm, dogs began barking. He shouted at the top of his lungs for directions. No one answered. Growing afraid, he headed back to the road. Suddenly two lanterns shone. He spotted a cabriolet and ran to meet it. Bouvard was inside.

But where could the moving van have disappeared to? For an hour they called to it in the dark. Finally it showed up, and they arrived in Chavignolles.

A large fire of shrubs and pinecones was roaring in the dining room. Two places had been set. The furniture delivered by the cart cluttered the vestibule. Nothing was missing. They sat at the table.

Onion soup, a chicken, bacon, and hard-boiled eggs had been prepared for them. The old woman who handled the cooking came in now and again to make sure everything was to their liking. They answered, "Oh, very good, very good!" And the large bread they had some difficulty cutting, the cream, the nuts, all of it delighted them. There were gaps in the floor tiles and the walls oozed moisture. Still, they gazed around them with satisfaction, while eating at the small table on which a candle was burning. Their cheeks were ruddy from the fresh air. They ballooned out their stomachs, leaned back in their chairs, which creaked from the weight, and said over and over, "So here we are! I'm so happy! It seems like a dream!"

Although it was now midnight, Pécuchet decided to take a tour of the garden. Bouvard was all for it. They picked up the candle, which they shielded behind an old newspaper, and walked alongside the flowerbeds. They took pleasure in naming aloud all the vegetables: “Look, carrots! Ah, cabbages!”

Then they inspected the espalier. Pécuchet searched for buds. Sometimes a spider made a dash up the wall, the twin shadows of their bodies standing against it, enlarged, repeating their movements. The tips of the grasses were pearled with dew. The night was utterly black, and everything lay in complete silence, complete stillness. A cock crowed in the distance.

Between their two bedrooms was a small door masked by the wallpaper. Someone, bumping it with a chest of drawers, had recently knocked out the nails that kept it in place. They found it gaping open. It was a surprise.

Undressed and in bed, they chatted for a bit, then fell asleep—Bouvard on his back, mouth open, head bare; Pécuchet on his right side, knees pulled up to his chest, head ensconced in a cotton nightcap. And the two of them snored beneath the moonlight streaming in through the windows.

Two

WHAT A JOY IT WAS to wake up the next morning! Bouvard smoked a pipe and Pécuchet had a pinch, which they declared to be the best of their lives. Then they headed out to see the countryside.

Before them were fields, to the right a barn and the church spire, to the left a curtain of poplars. Two wide paths, forming a cross, divided the garden into four sections. The vegetables grew in the garden, and here and there rose dwarf cypresses and cordon trees. On one side, a bower led to an ornamental monticule that the locals called a *vigneau*, and on the other a wall supported the espaliers; in the background, a lattice fence allowed a view of the fields. Past the wall was an orchard, after the arbor a wood, and behind the fence a small path.

They were contemplating this grouping when a man with graying hair and dressed in a black cardigan came strolling along the path, raking the lattice with his cane. The old servant woman informed them that this was Dr. Vaucorbeil, who was famous throughout the area.

The other notables were Count de Faverges, formerly of the Chamber of Deputies, whose cowsheds were reputed far and wide; the mayor, Mr. Foureau, who sold wood, plaster, and sundries; the local priest, Abbé Jeufroy; and the widow Bordin, who lived on her savings. As for herself, they called her Germaine, after Germain, her late husband. She "did day jobs for people," but would love to be in the employ of these fine gentlemen. They accepted and set out for the farm, which stood about half a mile away.

When they entered the barnyard, the farmer, Gouy, was scolding a boy, and his wife, seated on a stepstool, was squeezing a turkey between her legs and gorging it with gobs of flour. The man had a low forehead, an aquiline nose, a shifty look, and strong shoulders. His wife was very blond, with freckles on her cheeks and the simple expression one sees on yokels in stained-glass windows.

In the kitchen, bundles of hemp hung from the ceiling. Three old rifles were spaced at intervals on the tall mantel. A dresser loaded with flower-print china occupied the middle of the wall, and squares of bottle glass cast a pallid light on the tin and copper utensils.

The two Parisians wished to make their inspection, having seen the property only once, and briefly at that. Farmer Gouy and his wife escorted them, and the litany of complaints began.

All the buildings, from the carriage barn to the cider distillery, needed repairs. They would have to build another room for the cheeses, run new wire on the fences, raise the banks, dig the pond, and replant a considerable number of apple trees in the three yards.

Then they visited the arable lands, which Farmer Gouy disparaged: they ate up too much fertilizer, the cartage was costly; impossible to get all the rocks out, the weeds were poisoning the meadows. And this denigration of his land lessened the pleasure Bouvard felt in walking on it.

They returned via the sunken road, beneath a canopy of beeches. The house, from this side, showed its main courtyard and facade.

It was painted white with yellow trim. The shed and the cellar, the bakehouse, and the woodshed formed two additional wings lower down. The kitchen was connected to a small room. Then came the vestibule, a second, larger room, and the living room. The four bedrooms upstairs opened onto a hallway that looked out on the courtyard. Pécuchet claimed one of them to store his collections; the last one would house the library. When they opened the armoires they found other volumes, but did not take the time to read their titles. For now, the most urgent thing was the garden.

Bouvard, passing near the arbor, discovered the plaster statue of a woman beneath its branches. She was pulling up her skirt with two fingers, her knees bent, looking over her shoulder as if afraid of being discovered.

"Oh, pardon me! Don't mind us!"

And they found this joke so hilarious that, twenty times a day, for more than three weeks, they kept repeating it.

Meanwhile, the burghers of Chavignolles were curious to meet the newcomers: people came to stare through the lattice fence. They stopped up the openings with planks. The population was offended.

To protect himself from the sun, Bouvard wore a handkerchief knotted into a turban on his head, and Pécuchet his cap. He also had a large apron with a pocket in front, in which a pair of pruning shears, his scarf, and his tobacco pouch jostled against each other. Arms bare and standing side-by-side they labored, weeded, pruned, gave themselves chores. They ate as quickly as possible, but still took their coffee on the monticule to enjoy the view.

If they encountered a slug, they snuck up on it and crushed it, grimacing at the corner of their mouths as if cracking a nut. They never went out without their spades, and cut earthworms in half with such force that the tool's blade sank three inches into the dirt. To rid themselves of caterpillars, they beat the branches furiously with a long pole.

Bouvard planted a peony in the middle of the garden and tomatoes that were meant to rain down like a chandelier, beneath the bower archway.

Pécuchet dug a large hole in front of the kitchen and divided it into three sections,

in which he would create composts that would nourish a whole host of things, whose own detritus would lead to other harvests producing more fertilizer, all unto infinity. And he daydreamed at the edge of his ditch, seeing in the future mountains of fruits, cascades of flowers, avalanches of vegetables. But he didn't have any horse manure, which he needed the fertilize the topsoil. The farmers weren't selling any, and the innkeepers refused to part with theirs. Finally, after much research, despite Bouvard's entreaties, and renouncing all modesty, he decided to "go to the dung himself!"

It was in the midst of this pursuit that Mme. Bordin, one fine day, came upon him on the main road. She greeted him, then asked after his friend. The woman's black eyes, brilliant though small, her high color, and her self-possession (she even had a bit of a mustache) intimidated Pécuchet. He answered tersely and turned back to his labors—an impoliteness for which Bouvard rebuked him.

Then came the difficult days of winter, with its snows and deep frosts. They settled into their kitchen and made latticework; or else wandered around the rooms, chatted by the fire, watched the rains fall.

By the third week of Lent, they were already eager for spring, and every morning repeated, "It's all starting!" But the season was late in coming, and they tempered their impatience, saying, "It's all about to start!"

Finally they saw the peas begin to sprout. The asparagus looked plentiful. The vines gave promise.

Since they knew how to garden, they could easily succeed in agriculture; and they were seized by the ambition of cultivating their farm. With common sense and a little study, they couldn't fail, no question about it.

First they needed to see how others did it, and so they drafted a letter asking Mr. de Faverges for the honor of visiting his concern. The count immediately granted them an appointment.

After an hour's walk, they arrived on the side of a hill overlooking the Orne valley. The river ran through the bottom of it, sinuously. Blocks of red sandstone rose here and there, and farther on large boulders formed a kind of cliff hanging over a countryside covered in ripe wheat. Opposite that, on the other hillside, the vegetation was so abundant that it concealed the houses. Trees divided the fields into uneven squares of grass, with darker lines running through the middle.

The entire domain suddenly came into view. Tile roofs identified the farm. The white facade of the count's chateau was on the right, with woods behind it and a lawn that sloped down to the riverbank, in which a line of plane trees reflected their shadows.

The two friends entered a field where alfalfa was being tossed. Women wearing straw hats, Indian headscarves, or paper visors used rakes to lift the hay that had fallen to the ground, and at the far end of the plain, past the bales, they were tossing sheaves onto a long cart harnessed to three horses. The count came forward, followed by his

estate manager.

He had a linen suit, a stiff bearing, and muttonchops, looking at once like a magistrate and a dandy. His facial features never moved, even when he spoke.

After the initial exchange of pleasantries, he explained his system with regard to forage: you had to toss the swaths without scattering them; the bales had to be conical and the sheaves made on the spot, then stacked by tens. As for the mechanical rake, the ground was too uneven for such an implement.

A little girl, her feet bare in her clogs, her body visible through rips in her dress, served drink to the women, pouring cider from an ewer that she balanced against her hip. The count asked where this child had come from; no one knew. The women had picked her up to serve them during the harvest. He shrugged his shoulders and, walking away, uttered a few remarks about the immorality of our rural areas.

Bouvard praised his alfalfa. It was indeed rather good, despite the ravages of dodder; the future agronomists' eyes widened at the word *dodder*. Given the number of animals, he concentrated on grasslands; it was, moreover, a good precedent for the other harvests, which isn't always the case with fodder roots. "That, at least, seems to me beyond dispute."

Bouvard and Pécuchet repeated in concert, "Oh, beyond dispute!"

They were at the edge of a flat, well-tilled field; a horse led by hand dragged a large chest mounted on three wheels. Seven coulters in the bottom traced fine, parallel furrows, into which the seed fell through tubes stretching to the ground.

"Here," said the count, "I plant kohlrabi. Kohlrabi is the basis of my quadrennial cultivation." And he began demonstrating the workings of the seeder. But a domestic ran up to find him: he was needed back at the chateau.

His estate manager took over for him, a man with a sly face and obsequious manner.

He led "you gentlemen" to another field, where fourteen harvesters, bare-chested and with legs spread, scythed rye. Their blades whistled in the straw, which fell to the right. Each man described a wide semi-circle before him, and all in the same line they advanced in cadence. The two Parisians admired their arms and were filled with an almost religious veneration for the earth's opulence.

Afterward, they walked alongside several areas being plowed. Dusk was falling; crows dropped into the furrows.

Then they were shown the herd. Sheep grazed here and there, and one could hear their continual munching. The shepherd, sitting on a tree trunk, was knitting a woolen stocking, his dog beside him.

The manager helped Bouvard and Pécuchet cross over a stile, and they passed by two dilapidated cottages, where cows ruminated beneath the apple trees.

All the farm buildings were near each other and occupied three sides of the

farmyard. The work there was done mechanically, using a turbine powered by a stream that had been diverted for that purpose. Copper wiring stretched from one roof to the next, and in the middle of the muck heap an iron pump was in operation.

The estate manager pointed out small openings at ground level in the sheep pens, and in the pigpens there were ingenious doors that shut by themselves. The barn was vaulted like a cathedral, with brick arches resting on stone walls.

To entertain the gentlemen, a servant girl tossed handfuls of oats to the hens. The shaft of the cider press looked gigantic, and they climbed into the dovecote. The dairy particularly fascinated them. Faucets in the corners supplied enough water to rinse the stone slabs, and when you entered, the freshness of it was surprising. Brown jugs, lined up on lattice fences, were full to the brim with milk. Shallower vessels contained cream. Loaves of butter stretched in a line, like sections of copper piping, and foam spilled over tin pails that had just been set on the ground.

But the jewel of the farm was the cattle barn. Slats of wood stretching perpendicularly from floor to ceiling divided it into two sections, one for the cattle, the other for the operation. It was hard to see, as all the shutters were closed. The cows ate chained to racks, and the heat from their bodies was reflected by the low ceiling. Then some light was let in and water trickled into the trough bordering the racks. A lowing arose; the sound of the hooves was like the clicking of sticks. All the cattle advanced their snouts between the slats and drank slowly.

The teams of workhorses entered the farmyard and the foals whinnied. On the ground floor, two or three lanterns were lit, then disappeared. The laborers passed by, sliding their clogs along the gravel, and the dinner bell sounded.

The two visitors departed.

Everything they had seen enchanted them; their decision was made. That very evening, they pulled from their library the four volumes of *The Country Home*, sent away for Gasparin's course, and took out a subscription to a farming journal. To get to the cattle markets more easily, they bought an old cart, which Bouvard drove.

Dressed in blue smocks and wide-brimmed hats, gaiters to their knees and crops in their hands, they prowled among the beasts, questioned the laborers, and never missed a single agricultural fair.

They soon exasperated Farmer Gouy with their advice, and especially deplored his system of letting certain parcels of land lie fallow. But the farmer clung to his routine. He went so far as to request that they waive part of the house rent, using the hailstorms as his excuse. As for his land rent, he paid none at all. At his more justified demands, Gouy's wife let out a hue and cry. Finally, Bouvard declared his intention not to renew the farmer's lease.

From that point on, Gouy skimped on the manure, let the weeds grow, ruined the soil, and finally departed with a hostile expression that presaged acts of vengeance.

Bouvard thought that twenty thousand francs, more than four times the amount of the farm rent, would do for a start. His notary in Paris sent the money.

Their farming operation included fifteen hectares in yards and meadows, twenty-three in arable land, and five in fallow ground located on a stone-covered hillock referred to as the Knoll.

They acquired all the indispensable tools, four horses, a dozen cows, six pigs, one hundred sixty sheep, and, as farmhands, two carters, two servant girls, a valet, a shepherd, and to top it all off a huge dog.

For ready cash, they sold off their fodder. They were paid at the house; the gold napoleons counted out on the oats chest seemed shinier than any others, rarer and more valuable.

In the month of November, they brewed cider. It was Bouvard who whipped the horse and Pécuchet, up in the trough, who turned over the marc with a shovel. They panted as they tightened the vise, ladled in the vat, checked the stoppers, wore heavy clogs, and enjoyed themselves tremendously.

Starting with the principle that you can never have enough wheat, they did away with roughly half of their meadowlands; and, since they had no fertilizer, they used clods of manure, which they buried intact. The yield was pitiful.

The following year, they sowed very densely. The storms came. The seedlings washed away.

Nonetheless, they clung stubbornly to wheat and undertook to clear the Knoll of stones. A small rubbish cart carried off the rocks. All the year long, from morning until evening, in rain or shine, one saw the sempiternal cart, with the same man and the same horse, creak its way up, down, and back up the little hill. Sometimes Bouvard walked behind it, stopping halfway to mop his brow.

Trusting no one, they treated the animals themselves, administering purges and enemas.

Serious troubles occurred. The girl who looked after the farmyard got pregnant. They hired only married couples; children proliferated, as did cousins, uncles, and sisters-in-law. A horde was living at their expense, and they decided to take turns sleeping at the farm.

But the evenings were sad. The squalor of the room offended them, and Germaine, who brought their meals, grumbled at every trip. And still things went on behind their backs. The threshers in the barn stuffed corn into their drinking jugs. Pécuchet caught one of them and, shoving him out by the shoulders, cried, “Miserable wretch! You’re the disgrace of the village where you were born!”

His demeanor inspired no respect. Moreover, he missed his garden. If he spent all his time just trying to maintain it, it would still not be enough. Bouvard could handle the farm. They talked it over, and this arrangement was adopted.

The first order of business was to have good hotbeds. Pécuchet had one built out of brick. He painted the frame himself and, fearing sunstroke, whitewashed all the bell jars.

For the cuttings, he was careful to clip the buds with the leaves. Then he started in with layering. He tried out several kinds of grafts: splice grafts, crown grafts, inoculates, herbaceous grafts, and whip grafts. And he took such care in adjusting the two libers! How well he had tightened the ligatures! He used so much paste to cover them!

Twice a day, he took his watering can and swung it over the plants as if he were diffusing incense. As the leaves turned greener, beneath the water falling in a fine rain, he felt as if he were being refreshed and reborn with them. Then, ceding to a moment of giddiness, he yanked off the sprinkler head and drenched them copiously.

At the end of the arbor, near the plaster lady, stood a kind of log cabin. Pécuchet stored his tools in it, and there he spent delightful hours husking seeds, writing labels, arranging his little pots. To take a break, he sat on a crate by the door and planned improvements to the garden.

He had made two bushels of geraniums for the foot of the steps. Between the cypresses and the cordons he planted sunflowers. And as the flowerbeds were covered in buttercups, and all the alleyways in fresh sand, the garden was resplendent with a variety of yellow tones.

But the hotbed was soon crawling with larvae; and despite the insulation of the dead leaves, beneath the painted frame and slathered lids the growth was sickly to behold. The cuttings didn't take; the grafts came undone; the sap in the layers stopped flowing; the trees had white spots on their roots; the seedlings were a desolation. The wind enjoyed flattening the beanstalks. The abundance of sludge ruined the strawberries, the lack of pinching killed the tomatoes.

There was no broccoli, eggplant, turnips, or watercress, which he had tried to grow in a tub. After the thaw, they lost the artichokes. The cabbages were his only consolation. One in particular gave him hope. It blossomed, grew, ended up being huge and absolutely inedible. No matter: Pécuchet was glad to have produced a monster.

Then he attempted what seemed to him the summa of the art: growing melons.

He planted seeds of several varieties in dishes filled with compost, which he buried in his hotbed. Then he set up another hotbed; and when it had given off its heat, he bedded out the best-looking plants and covered them with lids. He did all his pruning following the instructions in the gardening manual, respected the buds, let the fruits intertwine, chose one per shoot, eliminated the others, and as soon as they had reached the size of a nut, he slipped a small board under the skin to keep them from rotting on contact with the dung. He sprayed them, aerated them, wiped the condensation from the bell jars with his handkerchief, and if the sky grew cloudy he quickly brought straw matting.

At night he couldn't sleep. He even got up several times and, barefoot in his boots, shivering beneath his nightshirt, he crossed the entire length of the garden to go spread his quilt over the canvas tarpaulins.

The cantaloupes ripened. At the first one, Bouvard made a face. The second was no better, nor the third. For each, Pécuchet found a new excuse, up until the last one which he tossed out the window, saying he gave up.

In fact, as he had grown different varieties in close proximity, the sweet melons had mixed with the squashes, the large Portugal with the grand Mongolian, and with the tomatoes completing the anarchy, the result had been abominable hybrids that tasted like pumpkin.

So Pécuchet turned instead to flowers. He wrote to Dumouchel to get shrubs with seeds, brought in a supply of peat moss, and resolutely set to the task.

But he planted his passion flowers in the shade and his pansies in the bright sun, smothered the hyacinths in manure, watered the lilies after they'd flowered, destroyed the rhododendrons through excessive cutting, stimulated the fuchsias with glue, and roasted a pomegranate tree by exposing it to the heat from the kitchen.

As the cold weather approached, he sheltered the wild roses beneath cardboard domes coated in wax: they looked like sugarloaves held aloft by sticks.

The dahlias were leggy, and between the straight lines one could see the tortuous branches of a *Sophora japonica* that remained immutable, refusing to perish or to grow.

Still, since the rarest trees grew in the gardens of the capital, they should succeed in Chavignolles; and Pécuchet procured Indian lilacs, China roses, and eucalyptus, then at the height of its reputation. All his efforts failed. Each time he was nonplused.

Like him, Bouvard encountered obstacles. They consulted each other, opened one book after another, and didn't know what to think faced with all the conflicting opinions.

When it came to marl, for instance, Puvis recommended it, the Roret manual was steadfastly against it. As for gypsum, despite Franklin's example, Rieffel and Mr. Rigaud seemed less than enthusiastic.

Letting parcels lie fallow, according to Bouvard, was a gothic prejudice. Nevertheless, Leclerc noted cases in which this was all but indispensable. Gasparin cited a man from Lyons who, for half a century, grew cereals in the same field: so much for the theory of crop rotation. Tull preferred plowing to fertilizers, but then there was Major Beatson, who did away with fertilizers *and* plowing!

To familiarize themselves with weather signs, they studied the clouds, following Luke Howard's classifications. They contemplated the ones that stretched out like plumes, the ones that looked like islands, and the ones you could mistake for snowcapped mountains; endeavored to distinguish nimbus from cirrus, stratus from cumulus. The shapes changed before they could remember the names.

The barometer misled them, the thermometer told them nothing. They resorted to the expedient dreamed up by a priest from Touraine under Louis XV: a flea in a jar should climb up the sides in case of rain, stay at the bottom in fair weather, and hop around if storms were threatening. But the atmosphere almost always contradicted the flea. They put three more fleas in with it. Each one behaved differently.

After much thought, Bouvard admitted he had made a mistake. His property required large-scale farming, the intensive system, and he invested what remained of his available capital, some thirty thousand francs.

Egged on by Pécuchet, he caught fertilizer fever. In the compost ditch he piled branches, blood, entrails, feathers, and whatever else he could find. He used Belgian liqueur, Swiss fertilizer, lye, pickled herrings, wrack, and rags; had guano brought in and tried to make his own—and, standing firm on his principles, did not tolerate any waste of urine; he got rid of the commodes. Into his farmyard they brought animal cadavers, with which he manured his lands. Their dismembered corpses littered the countryside. Bouvard smiled in the midst of this infection. A pump installed in a tipcart spat puree on the crops. To those who didn't hide their disgust, he said, "But it's pure gold! Pure gold!" And he regretted not having still more fertilizer. How fortunate were those who lived where you could find natural grottoes full of bird droppings!

The rapeseed was puny, the oats mediocre, and the wheat sold very poorly because of its odor. One odd thing was that the Knoll, finally rid of rocks, yielded less than before.

He decided to update his tools. He bought a Guillaume scarifier, a Valcourt grubber, an English sowing machine, and Mathieu de Dombasle's large swing plow, but the carter pooh-poohed it.

"Learn how to use it!"

"All right, then—show me."

He tried to demonstrate, got mixed up, and the peasants snickered.

Nor could he compel them to follow his orders about the bell jars. He was constantly yelling after them, running from one place to another, jotting his observations in a notebook. He set meetings, forgot about them, and his head seethed with industrial projects. He promised himself to grow poppies with which to make opium, and especially vetch, which he would sell under the name "family coffee."

To fatten his cattle more quickly, he bled them every two weeks.

He managed not to kill any of his hogs, but gorged them on salted oats. Soon the pigsty became too small. They cluttered up the farmyard, knocked down the fences, bit people.

During the hot weather, twenty-five sheep began to turn in circles, then dropped dead. That same week, three oxen expired, a consequence of Bouvard's phlebotomies.

To destroy cockchafer grubs, he thought to shut the hens in a spinning cage that the

two men pulled behind the plow, its only effect being to break the chickens' feet.

He made beer from oak leaves and gave it to the harvesters instead of cider. Stomach cramps became rampant. The children wailed, the women moaned, and the men were furious. They all threatened to pack up and leave; Bouvard gave in.

Still, to convince them of how innocuous his beverage was, he drank several bottles of it in their presence, started feeling funny, but hid his discomfort beneath an air of enjoyment. He even had the mixture brought to the house. He drank it in the evening with Pécuchet, and both men took great pains to find it good. Besides, it would be a shame to let it go to waste.

Bouvard's colic got so bad that Germaine had to fetch the doctor.

He was a serious individual with a bulging forehead, who began by striking a little terror in his patient. The gentleman's cholerine must have been caused by that beer everyone was talking about. He asked what it was made of, and disparaged it in scientific terms with a shrug of his shoulders. Pécuchet, who had provided the recipe, was mortified.

But despite the pernicious whitewashings, neglected hoeings, and weedings at the wrong time, the following year Bouvard had before his eyes a fine harvest of wheat. He decided to dry it by fermentation——the Dutch method, the Clap-Mayer system—in other words, he had it all cut down in one shot and piled in stacks, which would be knocked down once the gas had escaped on contact with the open air. After which, Bouvard walked away without giving it another thought.

The next day, as they were having dinner, they heard the beating of a drum beneath the row of beech trees. Germaine went out to see what the matter was; but the man was already too far away. Almost immediately, the church bell began tolling violently.

Anxiety seized Bouvard and Pécuchet. They stood up and, impatient to learn the news, rushed bareheaded toward Chavignolles.

An old woman passed by. She didn't know anything. They stopped a small boy, who answered, "I think it's a fire!" And the drum continued to beat, the bell rang louder and louder. Finally, they reached the first houses of the village. The grocer called to them from a distance, "The fire is at your place!"

Pécuchet sped up to a jog; and he said to Bouvard, running at the same pace at his side, "One, two, one, two, in time, like the hunters of Vincennes!"

The road they were following was all uphill; the sloping terrain blocked the horizon. They reached the top, near the Knoll, and saw the full extent of the disaster.

All the haystacks were flaming like volcanoes in the middle of the razed field, in the evening calm.

Around the largest one were perhaps three hundred people. Mayor Foureau, wearing a tricolor sash, shouted orders while boys with poles and hooks pulled the burning straw from the top, trying to save the rest.

Bouvard, in his rush, nearly knocked over Mme. Bordin, who happened to be there. Then, spotting one of his valets, he heaped insults on the man for not warning him. On the contrary, in his zeal the valet had run first to the farm, then to the church, then to Monsieur's house, and had come back via the other road.

Bouvard lost his head. His domestics surrounded him, all talked at once, and he forbade them from demolishing the haystacks, begged for help, demanded water, called for the firemen.

"If only we had any!" cried the mayor.

"It's all your fault!" retorted Bouvard.

He got carried away, yelled out some unfortunate remarks, and everyone admired the patience demonstrated by Mr. Foureau—who could be fairly brutal, as indicated by his thick lips and bulldog jaw.

The heat from the haystacks became so strong that you couldn't get near them. Under the devouring flames, the straw twisted and crackled; the grains of wheat stung your face like buckshot. Then the stack collapsed to the ground in a huge brazier that threw up a curtain of sparks. Ripples undulated from the red mass, the alternations of its color making parts of it pink like vermilion and others brown like dried blood. Night had come, the wind was blowing; whorls of smoke engulfed the crowd. Now and then, a spark floated through the darkened sky.

Bouvard pondered the fire, weeping softly. His eyes disappeared under puffy lids, and his whole face looked swollen with pain. Mme. Bordin, playing with the fringes of her green shawl, called him "my poor man" and tried to console him. Since there was nothing to be done, he should just put it behind him.

Pécuchet did not weep. Very pale, or rather pallid, his jaw hanging slack and his hair glued down by cold sweat, he stood to one side, lost in thought. But the priest suddenly appeared and murmured in a caressing voice, "Ah! What a shame. Truly, it's quite upsetting! I know what you must be going through…"

The others made no pretense of regret. They chatted with smiles on their faces, hands stretched out toward the flames. An old man picked up burning stalks to light his pipe. Some children began to dance. One urchin even cried out that it was funny.

"Oh, sure, it's funny all right!" answered Pécuchet, who'd heard him.

The fire died down, the stacks got smaller, and an hour later all that remained were ashes, which left round, black marks in the fields. At which point, everyone left.

Mme. Bordin and Abbé Jeufroy walked Messrs. Bouvard and Pécuchet back home. On the way, the widow addressed gentle reproaches to her neighbor about his lack of sociability, and the clergyman expressed the greatest surprise at not yet having made the acquaintance of such a distinguished parishioner.

Alone with each other, they searched for the cause of the blaze and, rather than recognizing along with everyone else that the damp straw had spontaneously ignited,

they suspected an act of vengeance. No doubt by Farmer Gouy, or perhaps the mole catcher. Six months earlier, Bouvard had refused the latter's services, and even stated to a group of onlookers that his trade was reprehensible and should be banned by the government. Since then, the man had been seen prowling in the environs. He wore a full beard and looked terrifying, especially at night, when he appeared at the edge of the courtyard shaking his long pole garnished with hanging mole cadavers.

The damage was considerable and, to try to get a sense of their situation, Pécuchet spent a week going over Bouvard's accounts, which struck him as "a veritable labyrinth." After collating the daybook, the correspondence, and the grand ledger covered in penciled notes and marginal addenda, he recognized the truth: no merchandise to sell, no receivables to expect, and in the coffers, zero. Their capital showed a loss of thirty-three thousand francs.

Bouvard refused to believe it, and they redid the figures at least twenty times over. They always arrived at the same conclusion. Two more years of this kind of agronomy would eat up their entire fortune!

Their only recourse was to sell.

At least they should consult a notary. The step was too painful to bear; Pécuchet agreed to handle it.

According to Mr. Marescot, it was better not to advertise. He would mention the farm to seriously interested parties and let them make their offers.

"Fine," said Bouvard, "we've got time." He was going to hire a farmer, and after that, they'd see. "We won't be any worse off than before. We'll just have to tighten our belts, that's all."

The belt-tightening concept bothered Pécuchet because of his garden, and several days later he remarked, "We should devote all our time to fruit farming—not just for sport, but as an investment. A pear that costs three *sols* to grow can sometimes be sold in the capital for up to five or six francs! Some gardeners make twenty-five thousand pounds in steady income off their apricot trees! In Saint Petersburg during the winter, they pay a napoleon for a single bunch of grapes! You've got to admit, it's a great industry! And what would it cost us? Some work, some fertilizer, and occasionally sharpening the pruning knife!"

He so fired Bouvard's imagination that, without further ado, they went combing through their books for the nomenclature of plants to buy and, having chosen names that appealed to their sense of wonder, they wrote to a nurseryman in Falaise. The man lost no time in sending them three hundred saplings for which he couldn't find a buyer.

They brought in a smith for the stay-rods, an ironmonger for the wires, a carpenter for the stakes. The espaliered shapes of the plantings were outlined in advance. Strips of lath on the wall stood in for fruit trees. Posts at either end of the flowerbeds stretched the iron wire taut. And in the orchard, hoops indicated vases and conical staffs

represented pyramids—so that when one arrived at their house, the grounds looked like they were littered with the wreckage of some unknown machine or the remnants of a fireworks display.

The holes were dug; they cut the tips off all the roots, good or bad, and buried them in a compost heap. Six months later, the plants were dead. New order to the nurseryman, and new plantings in deeper holes. But the rain soaked the ground; the grafts were buried or the trees came loose.

When springtime arrived, Pécuchet set about pruning the pear trees. He made sure not to cut down the leaders, was careful of the fruit spurs, and, stubbornly wishing to square the Duchess pears into uniform lines, he invariably broke off the spurs or pulled them out. As for the peach trees, he got confused between the upper mother branches, the lower mother branches, and the secondary lower mother branches. Sparse or crowded areas grew where they shouldn't, and it was impossible to create a perfect rectangle on the espalier, with six branches to the right and six to the left, not including the two main ones, the whole thing forming a handsome fish spine.

Bouvard labored to train the apricot trees; they resisted. He cut their trunks down to ground level; none grew back. The cherry trees, in which he had made gashes, produced gum.

First they pruned too far down, which killed the buds near the base; then not far enough, which attracted parasites; and they often hesitated, not knowing how to tell wood knots from flower buds. They had been thrilled to get flowers; but, recognizing their mistake, they pulled out three-quarters of them to fortify the rest.

They spoke constantly of sap and cambium, of fencing, breakage, disbudding. In the middle of their dining room, they kept a framed list of their saplings, with a number that was repeated at the foot of each tree in the garden, on a small piece of wood.

Up at dawn, they worked until nightfall, rush baskets around their waists. In the cold spring mornings, Bouvard wore his woolen jacket beneath his coveralls, Pécuchet his old frock coat under his apron, and the people passing by the lattice fence could hear them coughing in the fog.

Sometimes Pécuchet pulled his manual from his pocket and studied a paragraph, standing, with his spade beside him, in the pose of the gardener decorating the book's frontispiece. He found the resemblance quite flattering, and his respect for the author increased.

Bouvard was continually perched on a tall ladder in front of the pyramids. One day he was overcome by dizziness and, not daring to climb down, cried out for Pécuchet to come help him.

Finally the pears appeared, and the orchard had plums. Then they used all the recommended remedies against birds. But the bits of mirror were bright enough to be blinding, the clacking of the windmill kept them awake at night, and sparrows used the

scarecrow as a perch. They made a second one, and even a third, varying its costume to no avail.

Still, they could hope for a few fruits. Pécuchet had just handed Bouvard his accounting when they heard a clap of thunder and the rain began to fall, heavy and violent. The wind shook the entire surface of the espalier in intermittent gusts. The stay rods fell one by one, and the poor cordons, whipping about, slammed the pears into each other.

Pécuchet, caught by the storm, had taken shelter in the log cabin. Bouvard was in the kitchen. They saw shards of wood, branches, and roof tiles whirling in front of them; and the sailors' wives who stood watch on the coast ten leagues away did not have eyes that strained harder or hearts squeezed tighter. Then, all at once, the staves and crosspieces of the espaliers, along with the entire backing lattice, fell flat onto the flowerbeds.

What a sight there was when they made their inspection! Cherries and plums covered the grass amid the melting hailstones. The Colmar pears were lost, as were the Bési-des-Vétérans and the Jordoigne Triumphs. Among the apples there barely remained a few Bon-Papas; and twelve Tétons-de-Vénus, the entire peach harvest, rolled in puddles beside the uprooted box-hedge.

After dinner, which they barely touched, Pécuchet said gently, "We really should go see the farm, to make sure nothing has happened."

"Why? So we can find more reasons to be sad?"

"It's true, we haven't been very lucky." And they complained about Providence and Nature.

Bouvard, elbow resting on the table, gave off his little whistle, and, as troubles come in batches, his old agricultural projects floated up in his memory, especially the starch mill and the new kind of cheese.

Pécuchet breathed noisily; and, all the while stuffing pinches of snuff into his nostrils, he mused that if fate had so wished it, he would now be a member of an agricultural society, would shine at exhibitions, be quoted in the newspapers.

Bouvard cast pained eyes around him.

"I swear! I feel like getting rid of all this stuff and moving somewhere else!"

"Whatever you like," said Pécuchet. And a moment later: "The authors recommend stopping up the ducts. If not, the sap gets blocked and the tree suffers. To thrive, it really shouldn't bear fruit at all. Still, the ones that are never pruned or manured produce better fruit—smaller, maybe, but more flavorful. I demand that someone tell me why that is! And it's not just each variety that requires specific care, but each individual tree, depending on the climate, the temperature, and God knows what else! So then, where's the rule? And what hope do we have of any success or profit?"

Bouvard answered, "Gasparin says that profit cannot be greater than one-tenth of

the investment. We'd be better off putting the money in a savings bank. At the end of fifteen years, we would have twice as much just from the accrued interest, without driving ourselves crazy."

Pécuchet lowered his head.

"Fruit farming might just be a joke!"

"Like agronomy!" Bouvard shot back.

After that, they faulted themselves for having been too ambitious, and they resolved from then on to spend their efforts and their money more wisely. An occasional pruning would suffice for the orchard. The espaliers were removed and they would not replace the dead trees. But there would be some unsightly gaps, unless they destroyed all the others that remained standing. How to go about it?

Pécuchet drew several plot plans using his compass set. Bouvard gave advice. Nothing they came up with was satisfactory. Fortunately, their library contained a volume by Boitard entitled *The Garden Architect.*

The author divided gardens into an endless number of types. First, there was the Melancholic or Romantic variety, which featured everlastings, ruins, tombs, and an "ex-voto to the Virgin, marking the spot where a nobleman has been felled by an assassin's dagger." The Dreadful type was composed of hanging rocks, shattered trees, and burnt-out shacks. The Exotic type was achieved by planting torch-thistle "to inspire memories in a colonist or traveler." The Pensive type had to include a temple to philosophy, as at Ermenonville. Obelisks and arches characterized the Majestic type; moss and grottoes, the Mysterious; a lake, the Meditative. There was even a Fantastic type, the finest specimen of which could be found in a garden in Wurttemberg—for there one encountered successively a wild boar, a hermit, several sepulchers, and a skiff departing from the banks on its own power to bring you into a drawing-room, where spurts of water drenched you as you reclined on the sofa.

Before this array of marvels, Bouvard and Pécuchet were filled with wonderment. Still, the Fantastic type sounded like it was more for princes. The temple to philosophy would be unwieldy. The ex-voto to the Madonna would have no meaning, given the paucity of assassins; and too bad for the colonists and travelers, but American plants were too expensive. Rocks, however, were possible, as were shattered trees, everlastings, and moss—and with growing enthusiasm, after much trial and error, with the help of a single valet and for a minimal sum, they built themselves a residence that had no equal in the entire region.

The arbor, open at various intervals, allowed a view of the grove, filled with sinuous alleys like a labyrinth. In the wall where the espalier had been, they had tried to create an archway to give the effect of perspective. As the coping would not remain suspended, the result was an enormous gap, with ruins on the ground.

They had sacrificed the asparagus and in its place built an Etruscan tomb, in other

words a black plaster quadrilateral, six feet in height and looking like an oversized doghouse. Four fir saplings at the corners flanked this monument, which was topped by an urn and embellished with an inscription.

In the other part of the vegetable garden, a kind of Rialto straddled an ornamental pond, with mussel shells encrusted around its edges. The ground quickly absorbed the water, but no matter! A layer of clay would form to hold it in.

The log cabin had been transformed into a rustic cabana, using colored glass.

At the top of the monticule, six squared-off trees supported a tin cap with its corners curled up, the whole thing meant to evoke a Chinese pagoda.

They had gone to the banks of the Orne to choose blocks of granite, had broken them up, numbered the pieces, carried them back in a handcart, then joined them together again with cement, stacking them one above the other. In the middle of the lawn rose a boulder that looked like a giant potato.

But something more was needed to complete the effect. They cut down the tallest linden tree in the arbor (anyway, it was three-quarters dead) and lay it the entire length of the garden, making it look like it had been washed away by a flood or struck down by lightning.

Their labors finished, Bouvard, who was on the entrance steps, called from a distance, “Come here! You can see better!”

“See better,” was repeated in the air.

Pécuchet answered, “I’m coming!”

“Coming!”

“Hey, an echo!”

“Echo!”

Up until then, the linden had blocked this phenomenon, and it was further encouraged by the pagoda facing the barn, the gable of which overlooked the arbor.

To test the echo, they amused themselves by calling out funny words. Bouvard shouted some naughty ones.

He had gone to Falaise several times, on the pretext of expecting a bank transfer, and he always returned with small packages that he hid away in his drawer. Pécuchet left one morning to go to Bretteville and came back quite late, with a basket that he shoved beneath his bed.

When Bouvard awoke the next morning, he was in for a surprise. The first two yews of the grand alleyway, which only the evening before had been spherical, were now shaped like peacocks, a cone and two porcelain buttons forming each one’s beak and eyes. Pécuchet had gotten up at dawn and, trembling for fear of being discovered, had trimmed the two trees following patterns sent by Dumouchel.

For six months, the trees behind these two had more or less imitated pyramids, cubes, cylinders, deer, or armchairs, but nothing equaled the peacocks. Bouvard

acknowledged this with copious praise.

Claiming to have forgotten his spade, he dragged his companion into the labyrinth, for he had taken advantage of Pécuchet's absence to make something sublime of his own.

The gateway to the field was covered with a layer of cement, in which were embedded five hundred pipe bowls, each one aligned in perfect order and in the shape of Abd-el-Kader, Negroes, Turks, naked women, horses' hooves, and skulls.

"Now do you understand my impatience?"

"And how!"

And in their emotion, they hugged each other.

Like all artists, they craved applause, and Bouvard thought of holding a grand dinner.

"Careful!" said Pécuchet. "You'll get yourself caught in a round of entertaining. It's a bottomless pit!"

The matter was nonetheless decided.

Since moving into the area, they had kept to themselves. Everyone, curious to know them, accepted their invitation, except Count de Faverges who was called away to the capital on business. They made do with his factotum, Mr. Hurel.

The innkeeper Beljambe, who had once worked as a chef in Lisieux, was hired to prepare several of the dishes. He supplied a waiter. Germaine had requisitioned the farm-maid. Marianne, Mme. Bordin's servant girl, would come as well. As of four o'clock, the gate stood wide open and the two landowners, brimming with impatience, awaited their dinner guests.

Hurel paused beneath the row of beeches to put his coat back on. Then the priest came forward wearing a new cassock, and a moment later, Mr. Foureau in a velvet waistcoat. The doctor was giving his arm to his wife, who walked with difficulty under the shelter of her parasol. A flutter of pink ribbons undulated behind them: it was the bonnet of Mme. Bordin, who was dressed in a beautiful iridescent gray silk dress. The gold chain of her watch swung against her bust, and rings sparkled on her two hands gloved in black mittens. Last to arrive was the notary, a Panama hat on his head, monocle in his eye, for his official capacities had not stifled the man of the world in him.

The living room floor was so polished that you could barely stand. The eight Utrecht armchairs were lined up along the wall. A round table in the center held the liquor cabinet, and above the fireplace one could see the portrait of Bouvard Senior. The dull surface, hanging against the raking light, gave a grimace to the mouth and a squint to the eyes; a bit of mold on the cheeks added to the illusion created by his whiskers. The guests noted a family resemblance with his son, and Mme. Bordin, looking at Bouvard, added that he must have been a very handsome man.

After an hour's wait, Pécuchet announced that dinner was being served.

As in the living room, the white calico curtains with red edging were carefully drawn shut over the windows, and the sun, coming through the fabric, cast a yellowish light on the wood paneling, whose sole decoration was a barometer.

Bouvard sat the two ladies next to him; Pécuchet, the mayor to his left, the priest to his right; and they started in on the oysters. The oysters tasted of silt. Bouvard apologized profusely, and Pécuchet got up to go yell at Beljambe in the kitchen.

During the entire first course, composed of brill with a vol-au-vent and pigeon stew, the conversation revolved around the best way to make cider. After which they started in on foods that were easy or difficult to digest. Naturally, the doctor was consulted. He judged things skeptically, like a man who has gotten to the bottom of science, yet did not tolerate the slightest contradiction.

With the sirloin they served Burgundy. It was cloudy. Bouvard, attributing this accident to a poorly washed bottle, had three others tasted without any more success. He then served a Saint-Julien that was obviously too young, and all the guests fell silent. Hurel smiled continuously; the waiter's heavy footfalls echoed on the floor tiles.

Mme. Vaucorbeil, squat and sour-faced (she was, moreover, in the final stage of her pregnancy), had maintained an absolute silence. Bouvard, not knowing what to talk to her about, spoke of the theater in Caen.

"My wife never goes to the shows," the doctor broke in.

Mr. Marescot, when he'd lived in Paris, had attended only the Théâtre des Italiens.

"Sometimes," said Bouvard, "I treated myself to an orchestra seat at the Vaudeville to hear the comedy sketches!"

Foureau asked Mme. Bordin if she liked comedy.

"It all depends on what kind," she retorted.

The mayor kept after her. She riposted his jokes tit for tat. Then she gave her recipe for gherkins. Moreover, her talents as a homemaker were widely known and she had a little farm that she kept admirably.

Foureau called out to Bouvard, "Aren't you thinking of selling yours?"

"Goodness, for the moment, I'm not really sure…"

"You don't say! Not even the part at Les Ecalles?" answered the notary. "It would be ideal for *you*, Mme. Bordin."

The widow replied mincingly, "I fear Mr. Bouvard's expectations might be too high."

But perhaps he could be mollified.

"I would not even try!"

"Bah! What if you gave him a kiss?"

"You might as well give it a shot," said Bouvard. And he kissed her on both cheeks, to the applause of those present.

Almost immediately they uncorked the champagne, its detonations redoubling the good cheer. Pécuchet gave a sign, the curtains parted, and the garden appeared.

In the light of dusk, it was something terrifying to behold. The mountainous boulder occupied the entire lawn, the tomb formed a cube in the middle of the spinach, the Venetian bridge made a circumflex over the beans—and beyond that, the cabana was a huge black blot, for they had scorched its roof to render it more poetic. The yews, shaped like deer or armchairs, followed in a line up to the shattered tree, which stretched crosswise from the arbor to the bower, where tomatoes hung like stalactites. The occasional sunflower spread its yellow disk. The Chinese pagoda, painted red, looked like a lighthouse over the monticule. The beaks of the peacocks, struck by the sun, beamed light back and forth to each other. And past the lattice fence, its planks now removed, the flat countryside stretched to the horizon.

Before the astonishment of their tablemates, Bouvard and Pécuchet felt a veritable delight.

Mme. Bordin especially admired the peacocks; but the tomb was not understood, nor the charred cabana, nor the wall in ruins. Then everybody, one by one, crossed over the bridge. To fill the ornamental pond, Bouvard and Pécuchet had spent all that morning carting in water. It had leaked between the poorly sealed bottom stones, which were now covered in silt.

During the stroll, everyone allowed himself a critique: "If I were you, I would have done it this way." "The peas are late." "Frankly, this corner isn't very clean." "With that much pruning, you'll never get any fruit."

Bouvard was forced to reply that he didn't give a fig about the fruit.

As they were walking by the arbor, he said with a crafty air, "Ah, it appears we're intruding on someone. A thousand pardons!" No one responded to the joke. Everyone was familiar with the plaster lady.

Finally, after several detours in the maze, they arrived at the gateway with the pipes. The guests exchanged looks of stupefaction. Bouvard observed their faces and, impatient to hear their reactions: "Well, what do you think?"

Mme. Bordin burst out laughing. Everyone else followed suit. The priest emitted a kind of clucking, Hurel coughed, the doctor had tears in his eyes, his wife was seized by a kind of nervous spasm, and Foureau, who had no shame, snapped off an Abd-el-Kader pipe and stuffed it in his pocket as a souvenir.

When they had stepped out of the arbor, Bouvard, to astound his audience, shouted at the top of his lungs, "At your service, ladies!"

Nothing. No echo: restorations to the barn had demolished the gable and roof.

Coffee was served on the monticule, and the men were about to start a game of bowls when they saw someone staring at them through the lattice.

He was thin and tanned, wearing tattered red trousers, a blue jacket, no shirt, and

black stubble on his chin. He said in a hoarse voice, “Give me some wine!”

The mayor and Abbé Jeufroy had recognized him immediately as a former carpenter in Chavignolles.

“Go on, Gorgu, clear out!” said Foureau. “This is no place to come begging.”

“Me! Begging!” the man spluttered. “I fought in Africa for seven years! I just got out of the hospital. No work! Do I have to become a murderer, for Chrissakes?”

His anger receded and, fists on his haunches, he pondered the bourgeois with a cocky and melancholic look on his face. The fatigue of bivouacs, absinthe, and fevers, an entire lifetime of poverty and abjectness, showed in his troubled eyes. His pale lips trembled and rolled over his gums. The great purplish sky bathed him in a bloody light, and his obstinacy at standing there caused a feeling of dread.

To put an end to it, Bouvard went to fetch a not-quite-empty bottle. The tramp drank it down in one gulp, then wandered off into the oats, gesticulating to himself.

After that they chided Mr. Bouvard. Such indulgent behavior could only breed chaos. But Bouvard, irritated by his garden’s lack of success, took up the cause of the people, and everyone began talking at once.

Foureau praised the government, while Hurel recognized only landed property. Abbé Jeufroy complained that no one was defending religion. Pécuchet went after taxes. Mme. Bordin cried out periodically, “I, for one, detest the Republic!” and the doctor declared himself in favor of progress. “For let’s face it, gentlemen, we are sorely in need of reforms!”

“Perhaps,” answered Foureau, “but all these ideas are bad for business.”

“To hell with business!” cried Pécuchet.

Vaucorbeil continued: “At least grant us the ability to attract talent!”

Bouvard wouldn’t go that far.

“Is that your opinion, then?” replied the doctor. “I’ve got your number! Goodnight! And I hope a flood leaves you swimming in your ornamental pond!”

“I’ll be leaving as well,” Foureau said a moment later; and, pointing to his pocket where he had put the Abd-el-Kader: “I’ll come back if I need another one.”

Before departing, the priest confessed timidly to Pécuchet that he did not find the simulated tomb in the midst of the vegetables to be very appropriate. Hurel, taking his leave, bowed low to the remaining company. Mr. Marescot had vanished after dessert.

Mme. Bordin started in again with the details of her gherkin recipe, promised a second one for brandied plums, and took three more strolls up and down the main alleyway. The hem of her dress caught on the linden as she walked past it, and they could hear her murmur, “My God, what an asinine place to put that tree!”

All the way to midnight, the two lords of the manor vented their disgruntlement underneath the bower. No doubt two or three little things could have gone better with the dinner; and even so, the guests had stuffed themselves like pigs, which meant it

couldn't have been all that bad. But as to the garden, so much disparagement was due to the blackest envy—and, with their tempers rising:

"Oh, so there's no water in the pond! So can we get you a swan and some fish for it, too?"

"They barely even noticed the pagoda!"

"Saying that the ruins aren't clean is plain idiotic!"

"And the tomb inappropriate! Why inappropriate? Don't we have the right to build one on our own property? I'd even like to be buried there!"

"Don't say that!" said Pécuchet.

Then they passed the guests in review.

"The doctor struck me as a huge phony!"

"Did you see how Marescot sniggered at the portrait?"

"What a boor the mayor is! When you dine in someone's home, what the hell—you respect their interests!"

"Mme. Bordin?" said Bouvard.

"Pfft! She's a troublemaker! Let's drop the whole subject."

Disgusted with humanity, they resolved not to see anyone, to live exclusively by themselves, for themselves alone. They spent their days in the cellars cleaning tartar off the bottles, polished all the furniture, re-waxed all the floors; every evening, watching the logs burn, they debated the best heating systems.

To save money, they tried smoking their own hams and boiled their own washing. Germaine, finding them constantly underfoot, shrugged her shoulders. When they then started in on preserves, she lost her temper, so they set up shop in the bakehouse. This was a former laundry, and beneath the firewood was a large masonry tub, perfect for their projects, as they had been seized by the ambition of canning their own food.

Fourteen jars were filled with peas and tomatoes. They sealed the lids with quicklime and cheese, applied strips of cloth around the rims, then plunged them into boiling water. It evaporated. They poured in cold water; the difference in temperature shattered the jars. Only three were saved.

Then they bought old sardine tins, stuffed them with veal cutlets, and plunged them into a double boiler. They came out round as balloons; they would flatten once they cooled off. To pursue the experiment, they stuffed other tins with eggs, chicory, lobster, fish stew, and some soup. And they congratulated themselves, like Mr. Appert, on having "preserved the seasons." According to Pécuchet, such discoveries were more worthy than the exploits of the conquerors.

They improved on Mme. Bordin's pickles by spicing the vinegar with hot pepper, and their brandied plums were far superior! Through maceration they obtained raspberry liqueur and absinthe. With honey and angelica in a cask of Banyuls, they tried to make Malaga wine; and they also undertook to manufacture champagne! The bottles

of Chablis, cut with must, burst of their own accord. Then they no longer doubted their success.

As their studies developed, they began to suspect fraud in all food products.

They quibbled with the baker on the color of his bread. They made an enemy of the grocer by claiming that he adulterated his chocolates. They traveled to Falaise to order jujube and, before the pharmacist's own eyes, subjected his jelly to the water test. It came out looking like bacon rind, which indicated the presence of gelatin.

After this triumph, their pride knew no bounds. They purchased the holdings of a bankrupt distiller, and their house soon saw the arrival of sieves, casks, funnels, skimmers, straining bags, and scales, not to mention a crushing bowl with a metal ball and a Moorshead still, which required a reflector furnace with a ventilation hood.

They learned how to clarify sugar, and all about the different levels of heat, large and small granulates, blown candy, hard candy, runny candy, and caramel. But they were impatient to test out the still; and they tried their hand at fine liqueurs, beginning with anisette. The liquid almost always contained excess particles, or else it stuck to the bottom; and sometimes they made mistakes in the dosage. Around them the large copper vats gleamed, the distillation flasks advanced their pointed spouts, the casseroles hung from the wall. Often, one sorted herbs on the table while the other swirled the metal ball around the suspended crushing bowl. They rotated the spoons, tasted the mixtures.

Bouvard, bathed in a perpetual sweat, wore only his shirt and pants, which were hiked up to the pit of his stomach by suspenders; but, scatterbrained as a bird, he forgot the diaphragm of the cucurbit, or turned the fire up too high. Pécuchet muttered calculations, immobile in his long blouse, a kind of child's smock with sleeves. And they considered themselves very serious individuals, occupied with useful pursuits.

Finally, they dreamed of a cream liqueur that would outshine all the others. They would use coriander as in kummel, kirsch as in maraschino, hyssop as in chartreuse, ambrette as in Vespetro, *Calamus aromaticus* as in Krambambuli, and they would color it red with sandalwood. But what name should they market it under? For they needed a label that would be easy to remember, yet still exotic. Having considered many possibilities, they settled on "Bouvarine."

Toward the end of autumn, stains appeared in the three jars of preserves. The tomatoes and peas had rotted. It must have been a defect in the seal. And so the problem of sealing tormented them. But they didn't have enough money to try out new methods. Their farm was sapping them dry.

Several times tenant farmers had offered their services, but Bouvard hadn't wanted them. Still, his chief farmhand, following his directives, economized to excess, with the result that the harvests diminished and everything was in a state of collapse. They were discussing their troubles when Farmer Gouy walked into the laboratory, escorted by his

wife who stood timidly behind him.

Thanks to all the care it had received, the land had improved, and he had come to take the farm off their hands. He downplayed it: despite all the work, a profit was still risky. In short, he still wanted it, but only out of love for the area and because he missed such fine masters. He was sent away coldly, but showed up again that same evening.

Pécuchet had lectured Bouvard; they were about to give in. Gouy asked for a reduction in the rent; and as the others protested, he began whining rather than talking, taking the Good Lord as witness, enumerating his efforts, highlighting his merits. When they demanded that he name his price, he lowered his head instead of answering. Then his wife, sitting near the door with a large basket on her lap, started in with the same protestations, screeching in a shrill voice like a wounded hen.

Finally the lease was settled at three thousand francs per year, one-third less than before. Without further ado, Farmer Gouy offered to buy up the equipment, and the negotiations resumed.

The appraisal of the objects lasted for two weeks. Bouvard was sick to death of it. He finally agreed to sell it all for such a derisory sum that Gouy's eyes opened wide, and with a cry of "Agreed!" he grabbed Bouvard's hand and pumped it.

After which the owners, as was customary, offered lunch at the house, and Pécuchet opened a bottle of his Malaga, less out of generosity than in hopes of hearing it praised. But the laborer made a grimace and said it was "like licorice syrup." And his wife, "to get the taste out of her mouth," demanded a glass of brandy.

They had something more important on their minds! The ingredients for "Bouvarine" had finally been assembled.

They stuffed them all into the cucurbit along with some alcohol, lit the fire, and waited. Meanwhile, Pécuchet, tormented by the mishap with the Malaga, took the tins from the armoire, opened the lid of the first, then a second, then a third. He tossed them aside in a rage and called Bouvard over.

Bouvard shut the spout of the coil and hurried toward the preserves. Their disappointment was complete. The slices of veal looked like boiled shoe soles. A murky liquid had replaced the lobster. The fish stew was beyond recognition. Mushrooms were growing on the soup. And the entire laboratory reeked with an intolerable stench.

Suddenly, with the sound of a grenade, the still exploded in twenty pieces that flew as high as the ceiling, puncturing the pots, flattening the skimmers, shattering the glassware. The coal scattered in all directions, the oven was a wreck, and the next day Germaine found a spatula in the barnyard.

The pressure from the steam had blown the instrument apart, especially since the head of the cucurbit had been sealed shut.

Pécuchet had immediately ducked behind the vat and Bouvard had flattened on a stool. For ten solid minutes they remained that way, not daring to make the slightest

move, pale with terror, in the midst of the glass shards. When they were again able to speak, they wondered what the cause could be of so many misfortunes, and especially this latest one? And they didn't understand a thing, except that they had narrowly escaped death.

Pécuchet concluded with these words: "Maybe we just don't know enough about chemistry!"

Three

TO LEARN ABOUT CHEMISTRY they procured Regnault's textbook, and the first thing they found out was that "simple bodies might actually be compounds."

These bodies were divided into metalloids and metals—a distinction that, said the author, "is in no way absolute." The same went for acids and bases, as "a body can behave like an acid or a base, depending on the circumstances."

Notation struck them as baroque. The law of multiple proportions bothered Pécuchet. "Supposing that one molecule of A combines with several parts of B: it seems to me that this molecule should divide into as many parts. But if it divides, it's no longer a unit, the primordial molecule. I don't get it."

"Me neither," said Bouvard.

And so they turned to a less demanding work, Girardin's textbook, from which they gained the certainty that ten liters of air weigh one hundred grams, that pencils do not contain lead, and that diamonds are merely coal. What astounded them more than anything was that earth, as an element, didn't exist.

They grasped how a blowtorch worked, the nature of gold, silver, and soap powder, and the plating of casserole pots. And without further ado, Bouvard and Pécuchet delved into organic chemistry.

What a marvel it was to find that human beings were composed of the same substances as minerals. Still, they felt a kind of humiliation at the thought that their persons contained phosphorus like matches, albumen like egg whites, and hydrogen gas like street lamps.

After colors and fatty tissues, it was time for fermentation. This led them to acids, and the law of equivalents stumped them once again. They tried to clarify it using atomic theory, after which their confusion was complete.

To understand all this, Bouvard figured, they needed instruments.

The expense was considerable; they had taken on too much. But Dr. Vaucorbeil could no doubt enlighten them. They showed up during his office hours. "Gentlemen, I'm listening. What seems to be the problem?"

Pécuchet answered that they weren't ill, and, having explained the reason for their visit: "We would like to know about advanced atomic numbers, for starters."

The doctor blushed violently, then chided them for trying to learn chemistry. "I don't deny its importance, let me be clear about that! But these days you can't get away

from it! It's having a deplorable effect on medicine."

And the sight of the objects surrounding him buttressed the authority of his words.

Diachylon plaster and bandages lay about on the mantel. His surgical kit sat in the middle of his desk, probes filled a basin in the corner, and a picture of a man flayed alive was propped against the wall.

Pécuchet complimented the doctor on it. "Anatomy must be a marvelous subject."

Dr. Vaucorbeil waxed expansive on the pleasure he'd felt back when he did dissections; and Bouvard asked what the similarities were between a woman's insides and a man's. To satisfy his curiosity, the doctor pulled from his library a folio of anatomical plates. "Take them home with you! You can study at them at your leisure."

The skeleton amazed them, with its prominent jaw, the holes of the eyes, the frightening length of the hands. But they were lacking an explanatory text. They went back to see Vaucorbeil and, thanks to the manual by Alexandre Lauth, they learned the divisions of the skeleton, gawping at the spine—sixteen times stronger, it said, than if the Creator had made it straight.

"Why sixteen times, exactly?"

The metacarpals distressed Bouvard; and Pécuchet, fixated on the skull, was discouraged by the sphenoid bone, even though it resembles a "Turkish or Arabesque saddle."

As for the joints, too many ligaments hid them; and so they started in on the muscles instead. But the insertions were not easy to find, and when they got to the vertebral grooves they gave up altogether.

Then Pécuchet said, "How about if we take up chemistry again, so we can use the lab?"

But Bouvard protested, and seemed to recall that they made fake cadavers for use in hot climates. Barberou, by return mail, provided him with information on the subject. For ten francs a month, one could obtain one of Dr. Auzoux's figurines, and the very next week the courier from Falaise deposited an oblong crate at their door.

They carried it into the bakehouse, filled with emotion once the planks had been pried open, the straw had fallen away, the tissue paper had slid down, and the mannequin appeared.

It was the color of brick, without hair or skin, and was streaked with countless blue, red, and white filaments. It didn't look anything like a cadaver, but more like a kind of toy—a sinister, shiny toy that smelled of varnish.

Then they removed the thorax and saw the two lungs, like twin sponges, the heart like a huge egg with a bit of rib behind it, the diaphragm, the kidneys, and the whole mass of entrails.

"Let's get to it!" said Pécuchet.

They spent the rest of the day and all that evening at work.

They had put on smocks, like medical students in an amphitheater, and by the light of three candles they were laboring over their cardboard pieces when there came a banging at the door: "Open up!"

It was Mr. Foureau, backed by the local constabulary.

Germaine's employers had enjoyed showing off their new friend to her. She had immediately run to tell the greengrocer's wife, and the entire village now believed that they were harboring an actual corpse in their house. Foureau, giving in to public rumblings, had come to investigate. Onlookers stood gawking in the courtyard.

When he entered, the mannequin was lying on its side and, since its facial muscles had been detached, the eye bulged out monstrously. It was all rather horrifying.

"What brings you here?" said Pécuchet.

Foureau stammered, "Nothing, nothing at all." And, picking one of the pieces up off the table: "What's this, then?"

"The buccinator," answered Bouvard.

Foureau fell silent but gave a sarcastic smile, jealous that they had a form of entertainment he didn't understand.

The two anatomists made a show of pursuing their investigations. The crowd, getting restless at the doorway, had pushed its way into the bakehouse, and as they were jostling each other, the table shook.

"Ah, that does it!" cried Pécuchet. "Clear these people out of here!"

The police dispersed the onlookers.

"That's fine!" said Bouvard. "We won't be needing any more help."

Foureau, grasping the allusion, asked if they had the right to keep such an object in their possession, not being doctors. He was, moreover, going to write to the prefect about it. What a country! You couldn't find more inept, uncivilized, and backward people. The comparison they made between themselves and the others consoled them, and they aspired to suffer for science.

The doctor also paid a visit. He dismissed the mannequin as not very lifelike, but took advantage of the situation to give them a few pointers.

Bouvard and Pécuchet were delighted and, at their request, Dr. Vaucorbeil lent them several volumes from his library, declaring that they would never finish them.

From the *Dictionary of Medical Science*, they noted outstanding examples of birth labor, longevity, obesity, and constipation. If only they had known the famous Canadian de Beaumont, the polyphagics Tarare and Bijou, the dropsical woman from the Eure region, the Piedmontese who went to the stool only once every three weeks, Simon de Mirepoix, who died ossified, and that former mayor of Angoulême whose nose weighed three pounds!

The brain inspired philosophical reflections. They could distinguish the interior of the *septum lucidum*, composed of two lamellae, and the pineal gland, which looked like

a red pea; but there were peduncles and ventricles, arches, papillaries, stages, ganglions, and fibers of all sorts, and the foramen of Pacchioni, and Pacinian corpuscles—in short, an unfathomable jumble, enough to take up their entire lives.

Sometimes, in a state of giddiness, they completely dismantled the cadaver, then found themselves at a loss to put it back together.

The task was grueling, especially after lunch, and they soon nodded off to sleep: Bouvard with chin lowered, belly forward; Pécuchet with his head in his hands, elbows on the table. It was usually at such moments that Dr. Vaucorbeil, who was returning from his daily rounds, poked his head in the doorway.

"So, my dear colleagues, how goes the anatomy?"

"Great!" they answered.

And then he asked a few questions for the sheer pleasure of flustering them.

When they grew tired of one organ, they simply moved on to another, thus tackling and abandoning in turn the heart, stomach, ear, and intestines—for the cardboard man had become unspeakably boring, despite their best efforts to take an interest in it. Finally, one day, the doctor found them nailing it back into its box.

"Bravo! I expected as much." One couldn't simply undertake these studies at their age—and the smile that accompanied these words wounded them deeply.

Who was he to judge them incapable? Was science this man's exclusive property? As if he were such a superior individual!

And so, taking up the challenge, they went as far as Bayeux to find reference books.

What they still needed was physiology, and a book dealer found them the treatises by Richerand and Adelon, famous at the time.

All the clichés about age, gender, and temperament struck them as highly significant. They were thrilled to learn that tooth tartar contains three kinds of animalcules, that the seat of taste is in the tongue and the feeling of hunger in the stomach.

While trying to grasp their workings, they regretted not having the ability to ruminate, like Montègre, Mr. Gosse, and Friar de Bérard. And they chewed their food slowly, triturated, salivated, their thoughts pursuing the bolus in their entrails, following it even down to its final consequences; they were imbued with methodological scruples, a level of attention that was almost religious.

To induce digestion artificially, they crammed meat into a vial filled with the gastric juices from a duck, and they carried it under their armpits for two weeks, with no result other than infecting themselves.

They were seen running along the main road to town, wearing sopping wet clothes under the broiling sun. This was to verify whether thirst can be quenched by applying water to the epidermis. They returned home panting and both suffering from colds.

Hearing, speech, and vision were handily dispatched, but Bouvard lingered on

procreation.

Pécuchet's reservations on the subject had always surprised him. His ignorance seemed so complete that Bouvard pressed him to explain, and Pécuchet, blushing deeply, made a confession. Some practical jokers had once dragged him to a house of ill repute, from which he had fled, saving himself for the woman he would someday fall in love with. The happy circumstance had never arrived, and so, out of pride, financial hardship, fear of disease, stubbornness, and habit, at the age of fifty-two, and despite his years in the capital, he was still a virgin.

Bouvard could hardly believe it, and then he laughed out loud, but stopped when he saw tears in Pécuchet's eyes. For the man had not been lacking in passion, having fallen by turns for a tightrope walker, the sister-in-law of an architect, a shop girl, and finally a young laundress, and the marriage was even about to take place when he discovered that she was carrying someone else's child.

Bouvard said, "We can still make up for lost time. Come on, don't be sad. I can arrange it, if you want."

Pécuchet replied with a sigh that it wasn't worth thinking about; and they returned to their physiology.

Is it true that the surface of our bodies perpetually gives off a subtle vapor? The proof is that a man's weight decreases every minute. If each day one were to add what is missing and subtract the excess amount, health will be maintained in perfect balance. Sanctorius, the inventor of this law, weighed his food, all his excretions, and then himself every day for half a century, pausing only to note down his calculations.

They tried to imitate Sanctorius. But as their scale could not support the two of them, it was Pécuchet who started. He removed his clothing so as not to impede his perspiration and sat on the pan, completely nude, revealing, despite his modesty, his long, cylindrical torso, short legs, flat feet, and tanned skin. By his side, on a chair, his friend read aloud to him.

Some scientists claim that animal warmth is developed through muscle contractions, and that it is possible to increase the temperature of a tepid bath by shaking the thorax and pelvic region.

Bouvard went to find their bathtub, and when everything was ready he got in, equipped with a thermometer.

The ruins of the distillery, swept to the back of the room, formed a vague mound in the shadows. Occasionally one could hear the nibbling of mice; there was a smell of old dried plants; and feeling quite comfortable there, they chatted serenely.

Still, Bouvard felt a bit chilly.

"Wave your arms and legs!" said Pécuchet.

He waved them, without making the thermometer budge a jot.

"It's really cold."

“It’s not so warm out here, either,” answered Pécuchet with a shiver. “Try shaking your pelvic region. Shake it harder!”

Bouvard spread his thighs, rotated his hips, rocked his pelvis, and huffed like a sperm whale, then checked the thermometer, which was still going down.

“I don’t understand! I’m shaking it!”

“Not enough!”

And he resumed his gymnastics.

This went on for three hours, after which he snatched up the tube once more. “Sixty degrees? Oh, forget it! I’m getting out!”

A dog wandered in, half mastiff, half pointer, its fur yellow and mangy, tongue hanging from its mouth. What should they do? Not a bell in sight, and their servant was deaf as a stone! They were shivering furiously but didn’t dare budge for fear of getting bitten.

Pécuchet thought it wise to shout threats, rolling his eyes. The dog started barking and jumping about the scale, while Pécuchet, clinging to the ropes and folding up his legs, tried to stay as high up off the ground as possible.

“You’re not doing it right,” said Bouvard. And he began making ingratiating faces at the animal and uttering coaxing sounds. The dog evidently understood. It tried to lick the man’s face, clamped its paws on his shoulders, and scratched them with its nails.

“Oh, great! Now look—he’s got my underwear!”

The dog circled over the garment and lay down.

Finally, with utmost precaution, they ventured, one to come down off his scale, the other to climb out of the tub. And when Pécuchet was dressed, this exclamation escaped from his lips: “You, my dear fellow, will come in very handy for our experiments!”

What experiments?

They could inject the dog with phosphorus, then shut it in a cellar to see if it would breathe fire through its snout. But how would they inject it? And besides, no one would sell them phosphorus.

They thought of trapping it under an air pump, having it breathe various gasses, making it drink poison. That might not be so much fun! Finally, they decided to magnetize steel by contact with its spinal cord.

Bouvard, swallowing his repugnance, held out a plate of needles to Pécuchet, who tried to plant them in the vertebras. They broke, slipped, fell to the floor; he picked up others and shoved them in forcefully, haphazardly. The dog broke free of its bonds, flew through the window like a cannonball, zipped across the courtyard, into the vestibule, and appeared in the kitchen.

Germaine gave a series of shrieks at seeing the bloody thing with bits of rope around its paws. Her masters arrived at that very moment in hot pursuit. The dog took a flying leap and disappeared.

The old servant yelled at them. “This is another one of your harebrained schemes, no doubt about it! And just look at my kitchen! You’ve probably given him rabies! They throw people in prison who are better than you!”

They rushed back to the laboratory to test out the needles. Not one of them attracted the smallest filing.

Then Germaine’s hypothesis began to worry them. The dog could have gotten rabies; it might come back unexpectedly and attack them. The next day they canvassed the area seeking news of the animal, and for several years afterward, when walking in the fields, they changed direction whenever they saw a dog that looked like theirs.

Their other experiments also failed. Contrary to what the authors claimed, the pigeons they bled, whether on a full or empty stomach, died in the same amount of time. Kittens shoved under water expired after five minutes; and a goose that they had gorged with madder produced periostea that were completely white.

Nutrition tormented them.

How could the same nutrient produce bones, blood, lymphatic fluid, and fecal matter? But you can’t trace the metamorphosis of a foodstuff. The man who ingests only one kind of food is chemically equal to the man who absorbs several. Vauquelin, having calculated the amount of calcium contained in a hen’s grain, found a greater amount in the shells of her eggs. So then, substances are created. But how? No one had any idea.

No one even knew what the strength of the heart was. Borelli attributed it enough to lift a weight of one hundred eighty thousand pounds, while Keill evaluated it at around eight ounces, from which they concluded that physiology was (as the old expression put it) the “romance of medicine.” Unable to understand it, they didn’t believe in it.

They spent a month in the doldrums. Then they remembered their garden. The dead tree, stretching across the middle, was in the way; they squared it off. This exercise wore them out. Bouvard frequently needed to have the blacksmith sharpen his tools.

One day, as he was on his way there, he was accosted by a man carrying a canvas satchel, who offered him almanacs, religious works, holy medallions, and finally François Raspail’s manual on health.

This latter work so pleased him that he wrote to Barberou to send him Raspail’s longer work. Barberou mailed it, giving in his letter the address of a pharmacy where he could find the medicines.

The clarity of the doctrine seduced them. All infections are the result of worms. They ruin the teeth, burrow into the lungs, swell the liver, and ravage the intestines, causing them to make noise. The best thing for getting rid of them was camphor. Bouvard and Pécuchet adopted it; they sniffed it, chewed it, and distributed camphorated cigarettes, vials of sedative water, and aloe pills. They even undertook to cure a hunchback.

This was a child they had met at a fair. His mother, a beggar, brought the boy to their house every morning. They massaged his hump with camphor grease, applied a mustard poultice for twenty minutes, then covered it with diachylon plaster and, to ensure his return, fed him lunch.

His mind now focused on intestinal worms, Pécuchet observed a bizarre stain on Mme. Bordin's cheek. For a long time the doctor had been treating her with bitters; the stain, at first round like a twenty-*sol* coin, had since grown and formed a pink circle. They decided to rid her of it. She agreed, but demanded that Bouvard be the one to apply the ointments. She sat by the window, undid the top of her corsage, and remained there with her cheek tendered, looking at him in a way that would have been dangerous were it not for Pécuchet's presence. Within permitted doses and despite the fear of mercury, they administered calomel. One month later, Mme. Bordin was cured.

She sang their praises, and soon the tax collector, the mayor's assistant, the mayor himself—everyone in Chavignolles—was inhaling camphor through quills.

Still, the hunchback did not stand any straighter. The tax collector quit inhaling, as it was making his wheezing twice as bad. Foureau complained about the aloe pills, which gave him hemorrhoids. Bouvard developed stomach cramps and Pécuchet had terrible migraines. They lost their faith in Raspail, but were careful not to let on for fear it would damage the respect they now enjoyed.

They showed great enthusiasm for vaccines, learned how to let blood by practicing on cabbage leaves, and even acquired a pair of lancets.

They accompanied the doctor to visit his poorer patients, then consulted their books.

The symptoms the authors noted were not the ones they had just witnessed. As for the names of the illnesses, they were a mix of Latin, Greek, French, a smattering of every language. There were thousands of them. Linnaean classification was all well and good, with its genera and species, but how do you determine the species? They became embroiled in the philosophy of medicine.

They mused about Van Helmont's archeus, vitalism, Brownism, organicism; asked the doctor where the germ for scrofula came from, exactly what part of the body is susceptible to contagious miasma, and the means, in morbid cases, of distinguishing cause and effect.

"Cause and effect are hard to differentiate," said Vaucorbeil.

His lack of logic disgusted them and they began visiting patients on their own, entering people's homes on the pretext of philanthropy.

In the depths of rooms, on squalid mattresses, lay individuals whose faces hung to one side; others' were swollen and of a scarlet hue, or the color of lemons, or else violet, with pinched nostrils and trembling lips, moans, hiccups, and sweat, and breath like leather and old cheese.

They read their doctors' prescriptions and were amazed that sedatives were sometimes stimulants, emetics sometimes purgatives, that the same medicine could apply to different conditions, and that a single illness might be cured by opposing treatments.

Nonetheless, they gave advice, bolstered spirits, and had the audacity to perform examinations.

Their imaginations churned. They wrote to the King to propose that a rest home be established in the Calvados region, with them as instructors.

They went to see the pharmacist in Bayeux (the one in Falaise was still not speaking to them because of his jujube) and hired him to concoct *pila purgatoria* like the Ancients, in other words little medicine balls that one rolled between the fingers until they were absorbed into the system.

Working from the principle that lowering the temperature helps prevent inflammations, they suspended a woman suffering from meningitis from the ceiling joists in her chair, and they were swinging her back and forth between them when her husband showed up and kicked them both out.

To the great shock of the priest, they adopted the recent fashion of introducing thermometers into backsides.

Typhoid fever was raging in the area: Bouvard stated that he would not go near it. But Mme. Gouy, the farmer's wife, came moaning to their house. Her man had been sick for two weeks and Dr. Vaucorbeil was ignoring him. Pécuchet made it his cause.

Lenticular spots on his chest, pain in the joints, swollen abdomen, red tongue—he had all the symptoms of dothienenteritis. Recalling Raspail's dictum that feeding a patient starves a fever, he ordered broth and a little meat. It was at this moment that the doctor showed up.

His patient was in the middle of eating, two pillows propped behind his back, between his wife and Pécuchet, who was urging him on. Vaucorbeil rushed up to the bed and hurled the dish out the window, crying, "This is downright murder!"

"Why's that?"

"You're perforating his intestine, since typhoid fever is an alteration of his follicle membrane!"

"Not necessarily!"

And they began arguing about the nature of fevers. Pécuchet believed in their essence. Vaucorbeil felt they depended on the organs: "Therefore, I eliminate anything that can overstimulate!"

"But fasting lowers the vital principle!"

"What are you going on about with your vital principle? Where is that? Who has ever seen one?"

Pécuchet's answer was muddled.

"Besides, Gouy isn't hungry."

The patient nodded agreement in his cotton bonnet.

"Doesn't matter! He needs to eat!"

"Never! His pulse is at ninety-eight."

"What difference does that make?" And Pécuchet cited his authorities.

"Leave systems out of it!" said the doctor.

Pécuchet folded his arms.

"So, you're an empiricist, are you?"

"Hardly! But if one observes…"

"And what if one observes incorrectly?"

Vaucorbeil took that retort as an allusion to Mme. Bordin's cold sore, a story that the widow had spread far and wide and that irritated him no end.

"First of all, you need medical experience."

"The ones who revolutionized science didn't! Van Helmont, Boerhave, Broussais himself."

Vaucorbeil, without answering, leaned over Gouy and shouted, "Which of us do you want as your doctor?"

The drowsy patient saw two angry faces and started to cry.

His wife didn't know what to say either; one was skillful, but maybe the other had a secret?

"Very well!" said Vaucorbeil. "Since you can't decide between a man who has earned his diploma—" Pécuchet snickered. "What's so funny?"

"A diploma isn't always an argument."

The doctor was being attacked in his livelihood, his prerogatives, and his social standing. His fury knew no bounds.

"We'll see when you get hauled into court for practicing medicine without a license!" Then, turning to the farmer's wife: "Go ahead, do as you like, let him be killed by this individual, and may I be hanged if I ever set foot in this house again!"

And he stalked off under the beeches, gesticulating with his cane.

When Pécuchet returned home, he found Bouvard also in a highly agitated state. Foureau had just paid a visit, exasperated by his hemorrhoids. Bouvard had insisted in vain that they protected him from all other illnesses: Foureau, refusing to hear any of it, had threatened him with a lawsuit. Bouvard was in a panic.

Pécuchet told him the other story, which he judged more serious, and was a bit shocked by Bouvard's lack of concern.

The next day, Gouy had stomach cramps. It might have been due to indigestion. Could Vaucorbeil have been right? A doctor, after all, is supposed to know these things! Pécuchet was assailed by misgivings, afraid he was a murderer.

Out of caution, they sent the hunchback away. But because of the lost lunches, his

mother wailed and moaned. What was the point of making them travel all the way from Barneval to Chavignolles every day!

Foureau calmed down and Gouy's condition improved. By now, his recovery was certain: such a success emboldened Pécuchet.

"What if we practiced birthing on one of those mannequins…"

"Enough with those mannequins!"

"They're half-bodies made of skin, invented by apprentice midwives. My sense is, we should rotate the fetus."

But Bouvard was tired of medicine.

"The wellsprings of life remain hidden, there are too many illnesses, remedies are hard to determine, and not one author gives a reasonable definition of health, illness, diathesis, or even pus!"

Still, all their reading had gone to their brains.

Bouvard, coming down with a cold, imagined he was getting pneumonia. Since leeches hadn't relieved the twinge in his side, he resorted to a vesicatory, which affected his kidneys and made him think he was suffering from gallstones.

Pécuchet felt some stiffness while pruning the arbor and vomited after his dinner, which left him terrified. Then, noticing that his skin was a bit sallow, he suspected a liver condition, wondered, "Am I in pain?" and ended up deciding that he was.

Feeling sorrier and sorrier, they looked at their tongues, felt their pulses, changed mineral waters, purged themselves, and avoided cold, heat, wind, rain, flies, and above all drafts.

Pécuchet came to believe that taking snuff was lethal. Besides, sneezing can sometimes cause an aneurysm to rupture, and he abandoned his tobacco pouch. Out of habit, he still dipped his fingers in it occasionally, then quickly realized his carelessness.

Since black coffee excites the nerves, Bouvard tried to give up his demitasse; but he fell asleep after meals and awoke with a start, for prolonged slumber is a warning sign of apoplexy.

Their ideal was Cornaro, the Venetian gentleman who, through a judicious diet, had lived to an extreme old age. While not copying him point for point, one can take the same precautions, and Pécuchet pulled from his library a manual of hygiene by Dr. Morin.

How had they managed to survive until then? The dishes they loved were forbidden. Germaine, at a loss, no longer knew what to cook for them.

All meats have drawbacks. Sausage and pork products, pickled herring, lobster, and game are "resistant." The fattier a fish is, the more gelatin it contains, and therefore the heavier it is. Vegetables cause heartburn, macaroni gives you bad dreams, cheeses, "as a general rule, are hard to digest." A glass of water in the morning is "dangerous." Every beverage and foodstuff was followed by a similar warning, or else by the words

“Harmful! To be consumed in moderation! Not recommended for everyone!” Why harmful? What constituted moderation? How could you tell if something was recommended for you?

What a problem meals had become! They gave up coffee with milk, given its baneful reputation, and then chocolate, “a mass of indigestible substances.” There was still tea. But “nervous individuals should avoid it entirely.” Still, Decker in the seventeenth century prescribed twenty decaliters of it per day, so as to cleanse the morass of the pancreas.

This piece of information shook their confidence in Morin, all the more so in that he condemned hairpieces, hats, bonnets, and caps—a stricture that Pécuchet found abhorrent.

And so they bought the treatise by Becquerel, where they read that pork is a perfectly “good foodstuff,” tobacco completely innocent, and coffee “indispensable to military men.”

Up until then, they had believed that damp places were unhealthy. Not at all! Casper declared them to be less deadly than other places. One does not go swimming in the sea without having first cooled one’s skin. Bégin recommended jumping in while bathed in perspiration. A glass of wine after soup was considered excellent on the stomach. Lévy accused it of ruining the teeth. And as to the flannel undershirt, that safety net, that guardian of health, that palladium cherished by Bouvard and intrinsic to Pécuchet, there were authors who, without beating around the bush nor fear of public opinion, advised against it for plethoric or sanguineous individuals.

So what was hygiene?

“Truth on this side of the Pyrenees, an error beyond,” stated Mr. Lévy, and Becquerel added that it was not a science.

At that, they ordered a dinner of oysters, duck, pork with cabbage, cream, Pont-l’Eveque cheese, and a bottle of Burgundy. It was a liberation, almost a revenge, and they scoffed at Cornaro! What an imbecile you had to be to tyrannize yourself like that! What baseness always to think about prolonging your own existence! Life is only worth living if you enjoy it.

“Another helping?”

“Don’t mind if I do.”

“Me neither!”

“To your health!”

“And yours!”

“And to hell with the rest!”

They became overexcited.

Bouvard announced that he would have three cups of coffee, even though he wasn’t a military man. Pécuchet, his cap jammed over his ears, took pinch after pinch, sneezed

without fear. And feeling the need for a little champagne, they told Germaine to go straightaway to the cabaret and fetch them a bottle. The village was too far to walk; she refused. Pécuchet was indignant: “I order you, do you hear? I order you to go right now!”

She obeyed, but grumbling all the while, intent on leaving her incomprehensible and capricious employers as soon as possible.

Then, as before, they went to have their after-dinner drink on the monticule.

The harvest had just ended, and haystacks in the middle of the fields lifted their black bulk against the soft blue of night. The farms were still. Not even a cricket was to be heard. The entire countryside was asleep. They digested while sniffing the breeze, which refreshed their cheeks.

Far above, the sky was covered with stars; some shone in groups, others in a line, or else alone at distant intervals. An area of luminous dust forked above their heads, stretching from north to south. Between these lights were vast empty spaces, and the firmament seemed a sea of azure, with archipelagos and islets.

“So many!” cried Bouvard.

“That’s not all,” said Pécuchet. “Behind the Milky Way are the nebulas, and past the nebulas are still more stars. The nearest one is three hundred billion myriameters away.” He had often gazed through the telescope in Place Vendôme and remembered the figures. “The sun is a million times larger than the Earth, Sirius is twelve times the size of the sun, and certain comets measure thirty-four million leagues!”

“It’s enough to drive you mad,” said Bouvard.

He deplored his ignorance, and regretted not having gone to the Polytechnic Institute in his youth.

Then Pécuchet, pointing him toward the Big Dipper, showed him the North Star, then Cassiopeia with its Y-shaped constellation, sparkling Vega of the Lyre, and, lower down on the horizon, red Aldebaran.

Bouvard, his head thrown back, painfully followed the triangles, quadrilaterals, and pentagons that one had to imagine to get one’s bearings in the sky.

Pécuchet continued: “The speed of light is eighty thousand leagues per second. A beam from the Milky Way takes six centuries to reach us. In fact, by the time we see a star, it could well have disappeared. Some are intermittent, others never return—and they change position. Everything is in flux, everything is moving.”

“And yet the sun is immobile!”

“That’s what they used to believe. But scientists today say that it’s speeding toward the Hercules constellation!”

This upset Bouvard’s way of thinking, and after a moment’s reflection: “Science is based on data supplied by a small corpus of knowledge. Perhaps it doesn’t apply to all the rest that we don’t know about, which is much more vast, and which we can never

understand."

And so they discoursed, standing on the monticule in the light of the heavenly bodies, and their speech was interrupted by long silences.

Finally, they wondered if there were men in the stars. Why not? And since creation is harmonious, the inhabitants of Sirius must be outsized, and those of Venus very small. Unless creatures were the same everywhere. Up there are shopkeepers and policemen; people sell things, fight, dethrone kings.

Several shooting stars suddenly slid across the sky, describing something like the parabola of a monstrous rocket.

"Well," said Bouvard, "there go a few worlds that just disappeared."

Pécuchet replied, "If ours were to tumble away someday, the citizens of the stars wouldn't care any more than we do now. Ideas like that put a crimp in your pride."

"What's the point of all this?"

"Maybe there is no point."

"And yet…" And Pécuchet repeated "and yet" two or three times without finding anything more to say. "No matter, I'd still like to know how the universe was created."

"It must be in Buffon," said Bouvard, whose eyelids were beginning to droop.

"That's all for me. I'm off to bed."

The *Epochs of Nature* taught them that a comet had slammed into the sun and dislodged a portion, which became the Earth. First the poles had cooled off. The seas had enveloped the globe, then retreated into caverns. The continents split off. Animals and men appeared.

The majesty of Creation inspired in them a wonderment as infinite as itself. Their minds expanded. They were proud to reflect on such grand topics.

Minerals soon wearied them, and as a distraction they fell back on the *Harmonies* of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre.

Harmonies vegetal and terrestrial, as well as aerial, aquatic, human, fraternal, and even conjugal: all of these were included, not to mention the invocations to Venus, the Zephyrs, and Cupid! They were astounded that fish had fins, birds wings, seeds a skin—and they subscribed to the philosophy that ascribes virtuous intentions to Nature and considers it a kind of Saint Vincent de Paul perpetually occupied with spreading its munificence.

Then they admired its wonders—torrents, volcanoes, virgin forests—and they bought Mr. Depping's book on *The Marvels and Beauties of Nature in France*. The Cantal region possessed three, the Hérault five, Burgundy two and no more, while the Dauphiné alone counted as many as fifteen marvels. But soon there will be no more to be found. Grottoes with stalactites are sealing up, volcanoes are becoming extinguished, natural glaciers are melting, and the old trees where rites were celebrated are falling to developers' axes or dying out.

Their curiosity then turned to animals. They reopened their Bouffon and were ecstatic at the bizarre habits of certain beasts.

But since all the books in the world cannot replace personal observation, they went into farmyards and asked the laborers if they had seen bulls couple with mares, pigs seek out cows, and male partridges commit perversions among themselves.

"Never in my life." People even found these questions a bit odd for gentlemen of their age.

They decided to provoke abnormal alliances.

The least difficult was between a ram and a lamb. Their farmer didn't have a ram, so a neighbor lent hers, and, when the mating season arrived, they enclosed the two animals in the cider press, hiding behind the barrels so that the event could occur in peace.

At first each one ate its little mound of hay, then they ruminated: the lamb lay down and began bleating without respite, while the ram, steady on its crooked legs, with its long beard and hanging ears, stared at them with its pupils shining in the dark.

Finally, on the evening of the third day, they deemed it appropriate to give Nature a helping hand. But the ram, turning against Pécuchet, butted him in the groin with his horns, while the terrified lamb began circling around the cider press as if on a merry-go-round. Bouvard ran after it, jumped onto its back to hold it still, and fell to the ground with two fistfuls of wool.

They renewed their attempts with hens and a duck, then a mastiff and a sow, hoping to produce monsters and not understanding the first thing about the question of species.

The word *species* designates a group of creatures whose descendants can reproduce; but some animals classified as belonging to different species can reproduce, while others included in the same species have lost the ability.

They flattered themselves into thinking they could clarify the subject by studying germs, and Pécuchet wrote to Dumouchel for a microscope.

One after the other, they loaded the glass slide with hairs, flecks of tobacco, fingernails, and the leg of a fly. But they forgot the crucial drop of water, or else the cover glass. They pushed each other aside, jostled the instrument; seeing only a blur, they accused the optician. They started having doubts about the microscope. Maybe the discoveries people ascribed to it weren't so conclusive after all.

Dumouchel, sending them the invoice, asked them to gather him some ammonites and sea urchins, curiosities that still sparked his interest and that were common in their region. To excite them about geology, he sent them Bertrand's *Letters*, along with Cuvier's *Discourse on the Revolutions of the Globe*.

After reading these two works, they imagined the following:

First a vast expanse of water, from which emerged promontories dotted with lichens, but not a living soul, not a sound. It was a silent, immobile, naked world. Then

long plants waved in a mist that was like steam from a sauna. A red sun overheated the humid atmosphere. Then volcanoes erupted, igneous rock spewed from the mountains, and the porphyry and basalt sludge that flowed out of it hardened. Third tableau: in the shallow seas, islands of madrepore jutted forth, with bouquets of palm trees standing over them at intervals. There were shellfish like chariot wheels, tortoises that measured three yards, lizards sixty feet long, and amphibians that stretched their ostrich necks and crocodile jaws between the reeds; winged serpents took to the air. Finally, on the large continents, huge mammals appeared, their limbs misshapen like pieces of untrimmed wood, their hides thicker than bronze plate; or else they were hairy, thick-lipped, covered in manes and protective spikes. Herds of mammoths grazed the plains where the Atlantic once had been. The palaeothere, half-horse, half-tapir, ravaged with his snout the anthills of Montmartre, and the *Cervus giganteus* trembled beneath the chestnut trees with its cave bear voice, which caused the Beaugency hound, three times larger than the wolf, to yap in its lair.

Each of these epochs had been separated by cataclysms, the last of which was our Flood. It was like an extravaganza in several acts, with man as the apotheosis.

They were stupefied to learn that there existed in stones the imprints of dragonflies and birds' claws; and, having leafed through one of Roret's manuals, they went out hunting for fossils.

One afternoon, as they were digging up flint in the middle of the main road, the priest passed by, and, approaching them with an ingratiating voice: "You gentlemen have taken up geology? How wonderful."

For he approved of this science. It confirmed the authority of the Scriptures by proving the Flood.

Bouvard spoke of coprolites, which are petrified animal excreta.

Abbé Jeufroy seemed surprised by this fact; after all, if it were true, it was yet one more reason to admire Providence.

Pécuchet admitted that their research had not yet borne fruit. And yet the area around Falaise, like all Jurassic terrains, should be rich in animal debris.

"I have heard," answered Abbé Jeufroy, "that in Villers someone once found an elephant's jawbone." Moreover, a friend of his, Mr. Larsonneur, a lawyer, member of the bar in Lisieux, and amateur archeologist, could perhaps provide them with some information. He had written a history of Port-en-Bessin in which he noted the discovery of a crocodile.

Bouvard and Pécuchet glanced at each other. They had the same hope; and despite the heat, they stood there for a long time questioning the cleric, who was sheltered beneath a blue cotton umbrella. The bottom of his face was a bit fleshy, with a pointed nose, and he smiled continually, or bowed his head while closing his eyes.

The church bell sounded the angelus.

"Well, good evening, gentlemen! You'll excuse me, won't you?"

On his recommendation, they waited three weeks for a reply from Larsonneur. Finally it arrived.

The man from Villers who had unearthed the mastodon's tooth was named Louis Bloche; he had no further details. As to his story, it occupied an entire volume of the *Lexovian Academy Bulletin*, but he would not lend his copy for fear of breaking the set. With regard to the alligator, it had been discovered in November of 1825, under the Hachettes cliffs in Saint-Honorine, near Port-en-Bessin, outskirts of Bayeux. Followed by his best regards.

The obscurity surrounding the mastodon pricked Pécuchet's desire. He wanted to head immediately to Villers.

Bouvard countered that, to save themselves a possibly pointless and surely expensive journey, it would be better to get some information first, and they wrote to the local mayor to ask what had become of a certain Louis Bloche. In the event of his death, could his descendants or collaterals inform them about his precious discovery? When he made it, in what precise spot of the district lay this document of the primitive ages? Was there a possibility of finding others like it? What was, per diem, the price for one workman and one cart?

They also tried addressing themselves to the deputy mayor, then to the town councilman, but they received no word from Villers. No doubt the residents were jealous of their fossils. Unless they were selling them to the English! They decided on a trip to Hachettes.

Bouvard and Pécuchet took the stagecoach from Falaise to Caen. Then a cart brought them from Caen to Bayeux; and from Bayeux they went on foot to Port-en-Bessin.

They had not been misinformed. The coast of Hachettes was full of strange rocks, and, following the innkeeper's directions, they reached the strand.

The low tide revealed all its pebbles, with a prairie of seagulls stretching to the water's edge. Grassy undulations marked the cliff, composed of soft brown earth that, in hardening, had turned into a wall of gray rock in its lower strata. Trickles of water fell steadily from it, while the sea roared in the distance. At times it seemed to suspend its pounding, and the only sound left was the gentle gurgling of the springs.

They stumbled over the sticky grasses, and sometimes had to leap over crevasses. Bouvard sat near the bank and contemplated the waves, thinking of nothing, fascinated, inert. Pécuchet led him back to the coast to show him an ammonite encrusted in the rocks, like a diamond in its gangue. Their fingernails broke on it. They could use some tools, and besides the sun was setting. The sky to the west was purple and the whole beach was cloaked in shadow. In the midst of the seaweed, now almost black, the pools of water widened. The tide was rising toward them; it was time to go back.

At dawn the next day, armed with a pick and a crowbar, they attacked their fossil, whose envelope shattered. It was an *Ammonites nodosus*, gnawed away at the ends, but weighing a good six pounds, and Pécuchet in his enthusiasm cried out, "The least we can do is give it to Dumouchel!"

They came across sponges, lampshells, and tubipores, but no crocodiles! Failing that, they were hoping for the spine of a hippopotamus or an ichthyosaur, any fossil from the time of the Flood, when they spotted at human height, against the cliff, an outline delineating the curve of giant fish.

They deliberated on the best way to obtain it.

Bouvard would dislodge it from the top, while Pécuchet would demolish the rock below to make it slide down gently, without ruining it.

As they were pausing to catch their breath, they saw above their heads, in the field, a customs officer in a coat waving and shouting some kind of order at them.

"What do you want? Leave us in peace." And they continued their chore, Bouvard on tiptoe, tapping with his pick, Pécuchet bent over, tunneling with his crowbar.

But the customs man reappeared lower down, multiplying his signals: they couldn't have cared less! An oval object was emerging from the displaced earth, was beginning to lean forward, was about to come unstuck.

Another individual, wearing a sword, suddenly came into view.

"Your passports?"

It was the local policeman on his rounds, and at the same moment the customs man arrived, having run through a ravine.

"Arrest them, Morin, or the whole cliff will collapse!"

"It's for science," answered Pécuchet.

Then a mass of earth fell, brushing so close to the four of them that a few inches difference would have seen them all dead.

When the dust cleared, they recognized part of a ship's mast crumbling into powder beneath the customs man's boot.

Bouvard said with a sigh, "We weren't doing anything so terrible."

"It is forbidden to do anything in the jurisdiction of the Civil Engineers!" answered the policeman. "And anyway, what are your names, so I can bring suit?"

Pécuchet rebelled, protesting the injustice.

"No arguments! Follow me!"

As soon as they arrived at the port, a crowd of street urchins began escorting them. Bouvard, red as a poppy, affected a dignified air; Pécuchet, very pale, threw out furious glances. All in all, the two strangers, carrying stones in their handkerchiefs, did not cut very fine figures. For now, they were taken to the inn, where the innkeeper barred the door. Then the mason demanded his tools back. They paid for them—more expense! And the policeman still hadn't returned. Why not? Finally, a gentleman wearing a medal

of valor let them go; and they left, having given their names and address, with a promise to be more circumspect in the future.

Aside from a passport, they were lacking in quite a few items and, before undertaking further explorations, they consulted Boué's *Guide for the Geological Traveler*.

First you need a good rucksack, then a chain measure, a file, tweezers, a compass, and three hammers slipped into a belt that can be hidden under your coat, "thus preventing you from standing out, which one must avoid when traveling." In choosing a walking stick, Pécuchet went straight for the tourist model, six feet tall with a long steel point. Bouvard preferred an umbrella cane or convertible umbrella, with removable silk that could be carried separately in a small bag. Nor did they forget solid shoes with spats, "two pairs of suspenders" each, "because of perspiration," and, even though "a cap is not suitable for every occasion," they recoiled at the expense of "one of those foldable hats that are named after the milliner Gibus, their inventor."

The same guidebook gave the recommended rules of conduct: "Know the language of the country you are to visit"—they knew it. "Maintain modest attire"—such was their habit. "Do not carry too much money on your person"—not a problem. Finally, to avoid a variety of misadventures, it was advisable to claim "the occupation of engineer."

"Very well, then, we'll claim it!"

Thus prepared, they began their excursions, were at times absent for an entire week, spent their days in the open air.

Sometimes, on the banks of the Orne, they spotted sections of rock wall raising oblique blades through openings in the poplars and briars; or else they were saddened to come across nothing but layers of clay. When contemplating a landscape, they admired neither the series of planes, nor the distant perspectives, nor the undulations of greenery, but rather what could not be seen, the underside, the earth; and all the hillsides were for them "yet another proof of the Flood." Their obsession with the Flood was succeeded by an obsession with erratic masses. Large solitary boulders in the fields must have come from vanished glaciers, and they hunted for moraines and faluns.

Several times they were taken for peddlers, given their accoutrements; they explained that they were "engineers," but worried that falsely claiming such a title could land them in trouble.

At the end of the day, they huffed and puffed under the weight of their samples, but intrepidly brought them all home. They lined the steps, the staircases, the bedrooms, the living room, the kitchen, and Germaine complained about the dust.

It was no mean feat to determine the names of these rocks before attaching the labels. The variety of colors and granules made them confuse clay with marl, granite with gneiss, quartz with limestone.

And besides, nomenclature irritated them. Why Devonian, Cambrian, Jurassic, as if

the soil designated by these words could not be found other than in Devonshire, near Cambridge, or in the Jura? Impossible to find one's bearings; what for one author was a system for another was just a stage, and for a third a simple stratum. The different layers became intermingled, confused; but Omalius d'Halloy warned not to believe in geological divisions.

This statement comforted them, and when they had seen polypary limestone in a plain in Caen, phyllades in Balleroy, kaolin in Saint-Blaise, oolite everywhere, and had gone in search of coal in Cartigny and mercury in La Chapelle-en-Juger, near Saint-Lô, they decided on a more distant excursion: a trip to Le Havre to study pyrogenic quartz and Kimmeridge clay.

No sooner were they off the steamboat than they asked the way to the lighthouses. A mass of fallen rocks was blocking it; it was dangerous to go there.

A driver approached them and offered to take them around the area: Ingouville, Octeville, Fécamp, Lillebonne, "Rome, if necessary." His prices were outrageous, but the name Fécamp had struck them. If one turned off the road a bit one could see Etretat; and they took a coach at Fécamp to head as far out as possible, as a start.

In the coach, Bouvard and Pécuchet made conversation with three peasants, two women, and a seminarian, and had no qualms about calling themselves engineers.

They disembarked at the basin, reached the cliff, and five minutes later were hugging the sides to avoid a large pool of water advancing like a gulf in the middle of the shore. After that, they saw an arch opening onto a deep grotto; it had a very clear echo, like a church, with columns stretching from top to bottom and a carpet of seaweed covering its stone floor.

This work of Nature astounded them, and their minds rose to speculating about the origin of the world. Bouvard leaned toward Neptunism; Pécuchet, on the contrary, was Plutonian.

The core inferno had broken through the planet's crust, lifted land-masses, created crevasses. It was like an internal sea, with its own ebb and flow, its own storms; a thin film was all that separated it from us. One would never sleep if one thought about everything that lay beneath our feet. Yet the core inferno was diminishing and the sun weakening, to the point where one day the Earth would perish from cold. It would become sterile; all the wood and all the coal would be converted into carbonic acid, and no creature could survive.

"We haven't gotten there yet," said Bouvard.

"Let's hope not!" answered Pécuchet.

No matter, the end of the world, however distant it might be, darkened their moods and, side by side, they walked in silence over the pebbles.

The perpendicular cliff, all white and occasionally striped by lines of black flint, stretched to the horizon, like the curve of a rampart fifteen miles long. The wind blew

in from the east, bitter and cold. The sky was gray, the sea greenish and swollen. From atop the rocks, birds took flight, spun round, quickly returned to their holes. Sometimes a stone, coming unstuck, bounced from place to place before falling near them.

Pécuchet pursued his thoughts aloud: "Unless the Earth is destroyed by a cataclysm! We don't know how long our period is. The core inferno only has to spill over."

"I thought it was diminishing."

"That didn't stop its explosions from producing the Island of Julia, Monte Nuovo, and many others to boot."

Bouvard recalled having read these details in Bertrand.

"But such cataclysms never occur in Europe."

"I beg to differ: what about Lisbon? As for our own country, there are many coal and pyrite mines that could very well decompose and form volcanic mouths. Volcanoes, moreover, always erupt near the sea."

Bouvard gazed out over the waves, and thought he made out in the distance a column of smoke rising into the sky.

"Since the Island of Julia has disappeared," continued Pécuchet, "lands produced by the same cause might suffer the same fate. An island in the Archipelago is as large as Normandy, and even as all of Europe."

Bouvard imagined all of Europe engulfed in an abyss.

"Let's suppose," said Pécuchet, "that an earthquake takes place under the Channel. The waters rush into the Atlantic. The coasts of France and England topple on their foundations and tip over, crash into each other, and bam! everything between them gets crushed."

Instead of answering, Bouvard began walking faster, and was soon a hundred paces ahead of Pécuchet. Alone, he was tormented by the idea of a cataclysm. He hadn't eaten since morning; his temples were buzzing. Suddenly the ground beneath him seemed to shift and the cliff above his head begin leaning from the summit. At that moment, a shower of pebbles spilled from on high.

Pécuchet saw him bolt abruptly, understood his terror, and cried from a distance: "Wait! Wait! The period isn't over yet!"

And chasing after him, he took huge leaps with his walking stick, shouting all the while, "The period isn't over yet! The period isn't over yet!"

Bouvard kept running, in a panic. His convertible umbrella fell to the ground, the flaps of his coat streamed behind him, and the rucksack bounced against his back. He looked like a winged tortoise galloping among the rocks; then he disappeared behind a larger one.

Pécuchet arrived out of breath, saw no one, then turned back to reach the fields by a ravine that Bouvard must have taken. The narrow incline had large steps chiseled into the cliff, wide enough for two people and shining like polished alabaster. At an elevation

of fifty feet, Pécuchet wanted to head back down. But the sea was pounding hard, and he continued climbing.

At the second bend, seeing the void in front of him, he froze in terror. As he approached the third, his legs became weak. Gusts of wind vibrated around him, a cramp was pinching his epigastrium. He sat on the ground, eyes shut, aware only of the thudding of his heart that made it difficult to breathe. Then he tossed away his walking stick and resumed his ascent on hands and knees. But the three hammers in his belt jabbed him in the stomach; the stones in his pockets beat against his flanks; the visor of his cap blinded him; the wind redoubled its strength. Finally he reached the plateau and found Bouvard, who had climbed up by an easier ravine.

A cart picked them up. They forgot about Etretat.

The next evening in Le Havre, waiting for the steamboat, they came across a newspaper column entitled "On Teaching Geology." The article was full of information, and examined the question as it was then understood.

There had never been a total planetary cataclysm. The longevity of a given species is not always constant, but rather can vary from one place to another. Fields from the same epoch contain fossils of different ages, just as very disparate deposits yield similar fossils. Ferns from the past are identical to ferns of the present. Many contemporary zoophytes can be found in the most ancient strata. In short, current modifications explain earlier upheavals. The same causes always obtain, Nature does not make jumps, and periods, according to Brongniart, were after all merely abstractions.

Until then, Cuvier had seemed to them to shine as if in a halo, at the summit of an indisputable science. Now he was undermined. Creation no longer had the same discipline, and their respect for the great man diminished.

From biographies and digests, they learned something of the doctrines of Lamarck and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire. All this ran counter to the received wisdom, the authority of the Church.

Bouvard felt like a yoke had been lifted from him. "I'd like to see what Citizen Jeufroy would say to me now about the Flood!"

They found him in his little garden, awaiting the members of the vestry who were due to meet about acquiring a chasuble.

"How can I help you gentlemen…?"

"We'd like a clarification, if you don't mind."

And Bouvard began: what was the meaning, in Genesis, of "the fountains of the great deep broken up" and "the windows of heaven were opened"? The great deep cannot break up and heaven has no windows!

The priest closed his eyes, then answered that one must always distinguish between literal and figurative meanings. Things that might seem shocking at first become palatable if we explore them further.

"All well and good! But how do you explain rains that rose above the highest mountains, which measure two leagues! Think about it, two leagues! An amount of water two leagues deep!"

And the mayor, just arriving, added, "My word, that's some flood!"

"You'll agree," said Bouvard, "that Moses was making one hell of an exaggeration."

The priest had read Bonald, and replied, "I cannot speak to his motives. It was no doubt to strike a wholesome terror into the peoples he was leading!"

"And besides, where did that volume of water come from?"

"How should I know! The air changed into rain, as it does every day."

Through the garden gate, they saw Mr. Girbal, the tax collector, enter with Captain Heurtaux, landowner; and Beljambe the innkeeper was giving his arm to Langlois the grocer, who had trouble walking on account of his catarrh.

Pécuchet, without paying them any heed, began speaking: "Excuse me, Monsieur Jeufroy. The weight of the atmosphere, as science has demonstrated, is equivalent to a mass of water that could envelop the planet by only ten meters. Consequently, if all the condensed air fell on us in a liquid state, it would hardly increase the existing water level by very much at all."

And the churchwardens opened their eyes wide, listening.

The priest lost his patience. "Do you deny that shells have been found on mountains? What put them there, if not the Flood? As far as I know, they do not grow in the ground all by themselves like carrots!" And, having gotten a laugh out of the assembly, he added with pursed lips, "Unless this is yet another discovery of science?"

Bouvard tried to answer by citing Elie de Beaumont's theory on the up-thrust of mountains.

"Never heard of it!" answered the cleric.

Foureau hastened to interject, "He's from Caen! I saw him once at the prefecture!"

"But if your Flood," Bouvard resumed, "had carried all those shells along with it, we would find them in pieces at the surface, and not at depths of up to three hundred yards."

The priest fell back on the veracity of the Scriptures, the tradition of the human race, and the animals discovered in Siberia, encased in ice.

That didn't prove that man lived at the same time they did! The Earth, according to Pécuchet, was considerably older. "The Mississippi Delta goes back tens of thousands of years. The current period has lasted at least a hundred thousand. Manetho's lists…"

Count de Faverges walked up. Everyone fell silent at his approach.

"Please go on! What were you discussing?"

"These gentlemen are picking a fight with me," answered the priest.

"What about?"

"About the Holy Scriptures, your grace!"

Bouvard immediately put forth that as geologists, they were within their rights to discuss religion.

"Beware," said the count. "You know the old saying, my dear sir: a little science leads you away from religion, a lot of it brings you back." And in a tone at once condescending and paternal: "Trust me! You'll return! You'll return!"

Perhaps! But what was one to think of a book that claimed that light was created prior to the sun, as if the sun were not the only source of light!

"You're forgetting the kind they call boreal," said the clergyman.

Bouvard, without answering the objection, flatly denied that light could have been on one side and darkness on the other, that there was an evening and a morning when the stars didn't exist, and that animals had appeared spontaneously instead of forming by crystallization.

As the garden paths were too narrow, they trod on the flowerbeds, gesticulating all the while. Langlois was seized by a coughing fit. The captain cried out, "You are nothing but revolutionaries!" Girbal: "Peace! Peace!" The priest: "Such materialism!" Foureau: "Let's get on with our chasuble!"

"No! Let me finish!" And Bouvard, growing heated, went so far as to say that Man had descended from the Ape!

All the vestrymen stared at each other in amazement, as if to reassure themselves they weren't apes.

Bouvard continued, "If you compare the fetus of a woman, a bitch, a bird…"

"That's enough!"

"I'll go even further," cried Pécuchet. "Man descended from the fish!" Laughter rang out; but taking no notice: "The Talmud! An Arab book…"

"Come, gentlemen, let's get the meeting started." And they walked into the sacristy.

The two companions hadn't out-argued Abbé Jeufroy, as they would have expected. Pécuchet found that the priest bore "the stamp of Jesuitism."

Still, his boreal light troubled them, and they looked it up in d'Orbigny's manual.

It was a hypothesis to explain how plant fossils in the Bay of Baffin could resemble equatorial vegetation. It supposed, in place of the sun, a great source of light, now vanished, of which the aurora borealis was perhaps the last vestige.

Then they began to have doubts about the provenance of Man—and, at a loss, they thought of Vaucorbeil.

His threats had been forgotten. As before, he walked by their fence every morning, raking the slats with his cane as he passed.

Bouvard kept an eye out and, having accosted him, said he wanted his opinion on a point of anthropology. "Do you believe the human race descended from fish?"

"What nonsense!"

"From apes, right?"

"Directly? That's impossible!"

Who could they trust? The doctor wasn't even a Catholic!

They continued their studies, but without passion, having grown weary of the Eocene and the Miocene, of Mount Jorullo and the Island of Julia, of the mammoths of Siberia, and of fossils that every author inevitably compared to "medallions that provide authentic evidence"—to the point where Bouvard threw his rucksack to the ground one day and refused to go any farther.

Geology had too many flaws! They barely knew a few small areas of Europe. There were so many other lands they would never know, let alone the ocean floor.

Finally, when Pécuchet used the term "mineral kingdom": "I don't believe in the mineral kingdom! Organic matter was instrumental in the formation of flint, limestone, and maybe gold! Weren't diamonds once carbon? Coal an assemblage of vegetable matter? If you heat it to I don't remember what temperature, you get sawdust. Everything passes away, everything crumbles, everything changes. Creation is fleeting and unstable—we'd be better off spending our time on something else!"

He lay on his back and began to doze off, while Pécuchet, head lowered and a knee between his hands, abandoned himself to his thoughts.

A line of moss bordered a sunken path shaded by ash trees, their light tips trembling; angelica, mint, and lavender exhaled hot, spicy aromas; the atmosphere was heavy. And Pécuchet, in a kind of stupor, dreamed of the countless existences scattered around him, of the insects that buzzed, of the springs hidden beneath the grass, of the sap in the plants, the birds in their nests, the wind, the clouds, of all Nature, without seeking to discover its mysteries, seduced by its power, lost in its grandeur.

"I'm thirsty!" said Bouvard, waking up.

"Me too! I could go for a drink!"

"Easily done," answered a man passing by, dressed in shirtsleeves and carrying a plank on his shoulder. They recognized the tramp to whom Bouvard had once given a glass of wine. He looked ten years younger. He wore his hair in a kiss curl, his mustache was neatly waxed, and he waggled his hips like a Parisian.

About a hundred steps farther on, he opened the gate to a courtyard, tossed his plank against a wall, and invited them into a high-ceilinged kitchen.

"Mélie! Are you there, Mélie?"

A young girl appeared; at his command, she went to "fetch them a drink," and came back to the table to serve the gentlemen.

Her wheat-colored braids stuck out from a gray cloth bonnet. Her poor garments fell the length of her body without a fold and, with her straight nose and blue eyes, there was something delicate about her, something rural and innocent.

"She's a sweet girl, eh?" said the carpenter as she brought glasses. "You'd think she was a regular little lady dressed up as a peasant. And a hard worker, to boot! Poor little

darlin', when my ship comes in I'll marry you!"

"You're always teasing me, Monsieur Gorgu," she answered in a gentle voice with a drawling accent.

A stable boy came to get oats from an old chest, letting the lid fall so heavily that a splinter of wood flew off.

Gorgu lost his temper at the dim-wittedness of all those "country bumpkins," then kneeling before the chest he sought where to replace the splinter. Pécuchet, coming over to give him a hand, made out the figures of people beneath the coating of dust.

It was a Renaissance chest, with a spiral edge at the bottom and vine branches at the corners; small columns divided its front into five sections. In the middle one could see Venus Anadyomene standing on a shell, then Hercules and Omphale, Samson and Delilah, Circe and her swine, Lot's daughters making their father drunk. The whole thing was dilapidated, riddled with termite holes, and the right-hand panel was missing. Gorgu lit a candle the better to show Pécuchet the left-hand panel, which showed, beneath the tree of Paradise, Adam and Eve in a highly indecent posture.

Bouvard also admired the chest.

"If you like it, I'll let you have it cheap."

They hesitated, given the repairs.

Gorgu said he could do them himself, being a cabinetmaker by trade.

"Come on! Go ahead!"

And he drew Pécuchet toward the shack where Mme. Castillon, the mistress of the house, was hanging the laundry.

Mélie, after washing her hands, took her needlework from the windowsill, sat in the sunlight, and began to sew. The doorway framed her. The bobbins moved beneath her fingers with a clacking of castanets. Her profile faced downward.

Bouvard asked her about her parents, where she came from, how much they were paying her. She was from Ouistreham, no longer had a family, and earned a *pistole* a month. He liked her so much that he wanted to take her into his service, to help out old Germaine.

Pécuchet reappeared with Mme. Castillon, and as they continued their bargaining, Bouvard asked Gorgu under his breath if the little maid would agree to come be his servant.

"Would she ever!"

"Still," said Bouvard, "I'll have to check with my friend."

"All right, well, I'll handle it on this side. But keep it hush-hush because of the missus!"

They settled on thirty-five francs, and they'd see for the repairs.

No sooner were they in the courtyard than Bouvard confessed his plan for Mélie.

Pécuchet stopped walking to consider the proposal, opened his tobacco pouch, took

a pinch, and, having blown his nose: “Come to think of it, it’s a good idea! My word, yes! Why not? And besides, you’re the boss!”

Ten minutes later, Gorgu appeared on the bank of a ditch and called out to them: “When should I bring you the chest?”

“Tomorrow!”

“And for the other matter, have you decided?”

“Done!” answered Pécuchet.

Four

SIX MONTHS LATER they had become archeologists, and their home looked like a museum.

An old wooden beam stood in the vestibule. Geological specimens littered the staircase, and a length of chain stretched from one end of the hall floor to the other. They had removed the door between the two other bedrooms and blocked up the outer entrance to the second, making them into a single apartment.

Crossing the threshold, one came upon a stone trough (a Gallo-Roman sarcophagus); then one's eyes were struck by all the hardware. Against the opposite wall, a warming-pan hung over two andirons and a fireplace back decorated with a monk fondling a shepherdess. Small shelves hung all around the room held candlesticks, locks, nuts, and bolts. The floor disappeared under shards of red tiles. A table in the center displayed the rarer curiosities: the remains of a Breton bonnet, two clay urns, medallions, an opaline glass vial. An upholstered armchair had a triangle of guipure lace over its back. A section of a coat of mail decorated the wall on the right; and at its foot a halberd, a unique piece, rested horizontally on two spikes.

The second room, which one entered by walking down two steps, contained the old books brought from Paris and those they had discovered in the armoire when they first arrived. The doors of the armoire had been removed; this they called the library.

The Croixmare family tree occupied the entire back of the door. Over the wainscoting, the pastel figure of a lady in Louis XV costume acted as a pendant to the portrait of Bouvard *père*. The frame of the mirror was decorated with a black velvet sombrero, and an enormous clog, full of leaves, held the remains of a bird's nest.

On the mantelpiece, two coconuts (which Pécuchet had owned since his youth) flanked an earthenware barrel straddled by a peasant. Nearby, in a wicker basket, was a farthing that had been evacuated by a duck.

Set in front of the library was a chest of drawers covered in shells, with decorations in plush. Its lid supported a cat holding a mouse in its chops (petrified by water from the Saint Illidium fountain) and a sewing box, also covered in shells. On this box was a brandy carafe containing a Bon Chrétien pear.

But best of all was the statue of Saint Peter in the window frame! His gloved right hand clutched the key to Paradise, which was apple green. His chasuble, decorated with fleurs-de-lis, was sky-blue, and his bright yellow tiara was peaked like a pagoda. He had rouged cheeks, wide round eyes, a gaping mouth, and a crooked, turned-up nose. Above

him hung a canopy made from an old rug on which one could make out two Cupids in a ring of roses—and at his feet a butter-pot rose like a column, bearing these words in white on a chocolate background: “Executed before HRH the Duke of Angoulême, in Noron, October 3, 1817.”

From his bed, Pécuchet could see all of this lined up in a row, and sometimes he went into Bouvard’s room to get a longer perspective.

There was still an empty spot facing the coat of mail, reserved for the Renaissance chest. It wasn’t finished yet. Gorgu was still working on it, planing down the panels in the bakehouse, adjusting them, taking them off again. At eleven o’clock he broke for lunch, then went to chat with Mélie, and often did not reappear for the rest of the day.

To find pieces of wood that matched the chest, Bouvard and Pécuchet had gone out into the countryside. What they brought back wasn’t right. But they had come across a host of curiosities. They had acquired a taste for knickknacks, then a love for the Middle Ages.

First they visited the cathedrals; and the high naves reflected in the font, the breathtaking stained glass windows like curtains of precious stones, the tombs at the backs of chapels, the dim light of the crypts—everything, even the dampness of the walls, elicited a shudder of pleasure, a religious inspiration.

Soon they were able to distinguish the various periods—and, disdainful of the sacristans, they would say, “Ah! a Roman apse! That’s from the twelfth century. So we’re back to the flamboyant again!”

They endeavored to understand the carved symbols on the columns, like the two Marigny griffons nibbling at a blossoming tree. Pécuchet saw a satyr among the choristers with grotesque jawbones that terminated the soffits in Feuguerolles; and as for the exuberance of the obscene man on the mullions of Hérouville, it proved to Bouvard that our ancestors had a taste for the bawdy.

Before long, they could not tolerate even the slightest hint of decadence. They saw decadence everywhere, deplored vandalism, railed against whitewash.

But the style of a monument does not always correspond to its supposed date. The full arch from the thirteenth century still predominates in Provence. The more recent pointed arch might actually be quite old! And some authors dispute that Roman came before Gothic. This uncertainty distressed them.

After churches, they studied fortresses, particularly the ones in Dom-front and Falaise. The admired the grooves of the portcullis beneath the portals. Having climbed to the top, they first took in the entire countryside, then the roofs of the town, the intersecting roads, the carriages in the main square, the women at the laundry trough. The walls fell off sharply toward the undergrowth of the moats, and they shuddered at the thought that men had scaled them, hanging from ladders. They would have risked crawling through underground tunnels, if Bouvard’s paunch hadn’t been such an obstacle

and Pécuchet weren't afraid of snakes.

They wanted to see the old manors of Curcy, Bully, Fontenay-le-Marmion, and Argouges. Sometimes, at the corner of a house, behind the dung heap, a Carolingian tower rose into the sky. The kitchen with its stone benches called up images of a feudal feast. Others looked distinctly forbidding, with their three protective walls still visible, shutters beneath the staircases, long turrets with spiking tips. Then you came to a room where a window from the Valois days, chiseled like ivory, let in the sun that warmed the rapeseed scattered across the floor. Abbeys served as barns. The inscriptions on the tombstones were worn away. In the middle of the fields, a gabled roof remained standing, covered from top to bottom with ivy that rustled in the breeze.

A host of things aroused their acquisitiveness: a pewter jug, a strass belt buckle, calicos with large floral patterns. Their limited funds kept them in check.

By a stroke of good fortune, at a tinsmith's in Balleroy, they came across a Gothic stained glass window large enough to cover the right-hand portion of the casement behind the armchair, all the way to the second pane. The Chavignolles belfry was visible in the distance, producing a marvelous effect.

With the bottom of an armoire, Gorgu made a prie-dieu to put under the stained glass window, for he encouraged their obsession. It reached the point where they regretted the disappearance of monuments about which they knew nothing, like the country home of the Bishops of Séez.

"Bayeux," writes Mr. de Caumont, "must have had a theater." They looked for its former site, to no avail.

The village of Montrecy contained a field famous for the medallions found there. They anticipated a plentiful harvest. The groundskeeper barred them from entering.

They had no more luck finding the supposed pipeline between the reservoir in Falaise and the outskirts of Caen. Ducks that had been put in the former resurfaced in Vaucelles, chattering "Can can can"—hence the other town's name.

No effort or sacrifice was too great.

At the inn in Mesnil-Villement, in 1816, the archeologist Galeron had eaten lunch for a mere four *sols*. They went there and had the identical meal, and noted in surprise that things had changed!

Who founded the Abbey of Saint Anne? Was there a family connection between Marin-Onfroy, who in the sixteenth century imported a new variety of apple, and Onfroy, the governor of Hastings at the time of the conquest? How could one procure *The Cunning Fortune Teller*, a comedy in verse by a certain Dutrésor, written in Bayeux and now exceedingly rare? Under Louis XIV, Hérambert Dupaty—or was it Dupastis Hérambert?—composed a work that never saw the light of day, full of stories about Argentan. They had to unearth those stories. Whatever became of the handwritten memoirs of Mme. Dubois de la Pierre, consulted for unknown facts about the history of

Laigle by Louis Dasprès, head priest of Saint-Martin? So many problems, so many mysteries to clarify.

But often a tiny clue can put one on the trail of an invaluable discovery. Thus, they redonned their smocks, so as not to arouse suspicion; and in the guise of hawkers they showed up at people's houses, asking to buy old papers. They were sold stacks of them: school notebooks, old invoices, outdated newspapers, nothing useful.

Finally, Bouvard and Pécuchet went to see Larsonneur. He was completely absorbed in Celticism, and his cursory replies to their questions only gave rise to others.

Had they ever noticed traces of a dog-cult, as one sees in Montargis; or peculiar details in the Midsummer's eve bonfire, wedding ceremonies, popular sayings, etc.? He even asked them to find him some of those flint hatchets, which back then were called *celtae*, and which the druids used in "their criminal holocausts."

Through Gorgu, they procured a dozen of them and sent Larsonneur the smallest of the lot; the others enriched the museum.

They walked around the place lovingly, swept it clean themselves, told all their acquaintances about it. One afternoon, Mme. Bordin and Mr. Marescot showed up to see it. Bouvard greeted them and began his tour with the vestibule.

The ceiling joist was nothing less than the former gibbet from Falaise, according to the carpenter who had sold it to them, who claimed to have gotten it from his grandfather.

The thick chain in the hallway came from the dungeons of Torteval. It looked, said the notary, like those guardrail chains in front of people's entranceways. Bouvard was convinced that it had once served to bind convicts. And he opened the door to the first bedroom.

"Why do you have all these tiles?" cried Mme. Bordin.

"To heat the steam-rooms! But quiet, please! This is a tomb discovered at an inn, where they were using it as a humble water trough."

Then Bouvard grasped the two urns, full of a kind of dirt, which was human ash, and he brought the phial close to his eyes, to show the method by which the Romans shed tears.

"But everything here is so morbid!"

It was, in fact, a bit serious for a lady, and so he took several copper coins from a box, along with a silver denier. Mme. Bordin asked the notary what they might be worth in today's currency. The coat of mail he was examining slipped from his fingers and several links broke. Bouvard hid his annoyance.

He was even kind enough to take down the halberd—and hunching low, raising his arms, stamping his heels, he mimed slashing a horse's hocks, pointing as if with a bayonet, killing an enemy. The widow, in her heart of hearts, found him rather brash.

She was excited about the seashell chest of drawers. The Saint Illidium cat

impressed her greatly, the pear in the carafe somewhat less. Then, coming to the fireplace:

"Ah! Now *there's* a hat that could use some mending."

Three holes, the traces of bullets, pierced its brim. It had belonged to the leader of a gang of bandits under the Directory, David de la Bazoque, who had been betrayed, caught, and killed on the spot.

"Good for them!" said Mme. Bordin.

Marescot smiled disdainfully at the objects. He didn't understand why they were displaying the clog, which had been a cobbler's shop sign, nor the earthenware pitcher, a common cider jug; and the Saint Peter with its drunkard's face was frankly pathetic.

Mme. Bordin ventured the remark, "It must have cost you a pretty penny, all the same?"

"Oh, not too bad, not too bad!" A roofer had sold it to them for fifteen francs.

Then she criticized as improper the décolletage of the lady in the powdered wig.

"Where's the harm?" replied Bouvard. "When one has something beautiful to show?" And he added in a lower voice, "Like you, I'm sure?"

The notary had his back to them, studying the branches of the Croixmare family tree. Mme. Bordin didn't answer, but began playing with her long watch chain. Her breasts swelled the black taffeta of her corsage; and, knitting her eyebrows slightly, she lowered her chin, like a turtledove puffing out its throat. Then, in a childlike voice: "And what was the lady's name?"

"No one knows. She was a mistress of the Regent—you know, the one who fooled around a bit too much!"

"You're telling me! The memoirs of the period…!" And the notary, without finishing his sentence, deplored that example of a prince swept away by his passions.

"But you are all like that!" said Mme. Bordin.

The two men cried out in protest, and a dialogue followed on women and love. Marescot stated that there were many happy marriages. Sometimes, without even realizing it, one has everything one needs to be happy right in front of one. The allusion was clear. The widow's cheeks turned a deep purple; but, answering almost immediately: "We're past the age for such follies. Don't you agree, Monsieur Bouvard?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that!" And he offered her his arm to head into the other room. "Mind the step. There you go! Now, just look at that stained glass."

A scarlet cloak and two wings of an angel were all one could see, the rest hidden by the lead that held the many broken pieces in place. The day was waning, the shadows lengthening; Mme. Bordin had grown pensive.

Bouvard left the room, reappeared decked out in a woolen blanket, then knelt at the prie-dieu, his elbows sticking out, face in his hands, the sun's rays falling onto his bald spot. He was clearly aware of the effect, for his next words were: "Don't I look like a

monk from the Middle Ages?" Following that, he raised his forehead obliquely, eyes far away, suffusing his face with a mystical expression.

From the hallway, they heard Pécuchet's deep voice: "Don't be alarmed! It's only me!"

And he entered, his head completely covered by a helmet—an iron pot with pointed earpieces. Bouvard remained at the prie-dieu. The two guests stood where they were. A minute passed in astonishment.

Mme. Bordin seemed a bit cold to Pécuchet. Nevertheless, he asked whether she had been shown everything.

"So it seems."

And pointing to the empty space on the wall: "Ah, forgive me! This is where we'll put an object that is currently in restoration."

The widow and Marescot took their leave.

The two friends had thought to feign a rivalry. They each went shopping independently, the second one topping the first one's offer. This was how Pécuchet had managed to buy the helmet.

Bouvard complemented him, and was praised in return for his blanket. Mélie, using ropes, arranged it to look like a habit. They took turns putting it on to greet visitors, among whom were Girbal, Foureau, Captain Heurtaux, and several lesser individuals: Langlois, Beljambe, the farmers, and on down to the neighbors' servants. And each time, they repeated their explanations, showed where the chest would eventually go, affected modesty, begged indulgence for the clutter.

Pécuchet, on those days, wore the Zouave's fez that he had owned back in Paris, deeming it more appropriate to the artistic surroundings. At a given moment he donned the helmet, tilting it back over his neck the better to free his face. Bouvard did not forget to maneuver the halberd. Finally, with a glance, they asked each other whether the visitor was worthy of seeing "the monk from the Middle Ages."

What a thrill when Mr. de Faverges's coach pulled up at the gate! He had only one word to say. This is what happened:

Hurel, his business manager, had told him that in their search for documents they had bought some old papers from the Aubrye farm.

This was absolutely true.

And hadn't they discovered among those papers letters from Baron de Gonneval, who had been the Duke of Angoulême's aide de camp, and who had spent time at Aubrye? He wanted this correspondence, on behalf of the family.

They didn't have it. But they did have something else that might interest him, if he would be so good as to follow them to the library.

Never had such polished boots cracked in the hallway. They knocked against the sarcophagus, narrowly missed crushing several tiles, skirted the armchair, walked down

two steps—and once in the second room, the two men showed the count, beneath the canopy, in front of Saint Peter, the butter-pot made in Noron.

Bouvard and Pécuchet thought the inscribed date might be relevant to his inquiries.

Out of politeness, the nobleman inspected the museum. He said "Charming! Excellent!" over and over while giving his mouth little taps with the knob of his riding crop. For his part, he thanked them for having rescued these remnants of the Middle Ages, a period of religious faith and chivalrous devotion. He liked progress, and like them had spent time indulging in such rewarding studies. But politics, the regional council, farming, a veritable whirlwind kept him from pursuing them further!

"After you, moreover, we shall be left with the dregs, for soon you will have taken all the region's curiosities."

"In all modesty, we like to think so," said Pécuchet.

Nonetheless, one could still discover examples in Chavignolles: for instance, in the alley by the cemetery wall, there was a baptismal font hidden in the tall grass that had been there for ages.

They were pleased to have this information. Then they exchanged a look meaning "Is he worthy?"—but the count was already at the door.

Mélie, who was hiding behind it, ran off suddenly.

As the count was crossing the courtyard, he noticed Gorgu, smoking his pipe with arms crossed.

"Aha, so you've hired this boy! If there's ever a riot, I wouldn't turn my back." And Mr. de Faverges climbed into his tilbury.

Why was their maid so afraid of him?

They questioned her, and she told them that she had served at his farm: she was the little girl who had poured cider for the harvesting women on the day of their visit. Two years later, they had taken her on as a helper in the castle, then sent her away "because of false accusations."

As for Gorgu, what was there to reproach? He was very skilled and showed them every consideration.

The next day at dawn, they went to the cemetery.

Bouvard tapped the indicated spot with his cane. It sounded like something hard. They ripped out some thistles and uncovered a stoneware basin, a baptismal font in which plants were growing.

But it was hardly usual to stash baptismal fonts outside the church grounds.

Pécuchet made a sketch, Bouvard jotted down a description, and they sent it all off to Larsonneur. His answer came immediately: "Success, my dear colleagues! Beyond a doubt, it is a druid basin!" Nevertheless, caution was advised! The hatchet seemed dubious. And as much for his benefit as for theirs, he appended a list of works for them to consult. Larsonneur confessed in a postscript his desire to see the basin—which

would happen someday, when he could make the trip to Brittany.

And so Bouvard and Pécuchet delved into Celtic archeology. According to this science, our ancestors the Gauls adored Kirk and Kron, Taranis, Esus, Netalemnia, the Earth and Sky, the Wind, the Oceans, and above all the great Teutates, a pagan Saturn. For Saturn, when he reigned in Phoenicia, wed a nymph named Anobret, by whom he sired a child named Jeud. And Anobret had the features of Sarah, and Jeud was sacrificed (or very nearly so) like Isaac; thus, Saturn is Abraham, from which we must conclude that the religion of the Gauls was based on the same principles as that of the Jews.

Their society was highly organized. The first class of persons included the populace, the nobility, and the king; the second, jurists; and in the third and highest, according to Taillepied, were "the various types of philosophers," in other words the Druids or Saronides, themselves divided into Eubages, Bards, and Vacies. Some prophesied, others sang, still others taught botany, medicine, history, and literature—in short, "all the arts of their epoch." Pythagoras and Plato were among their students. They taught metaphysics to the Greeks, sorcery to the Persians, divination to the Etruscans, and to the Romans, plating copper and trading in ham.

But of this race, which dominated the ancient world, the only remaining traces were stones, either alone or in groups of three, or arranged into galleries, or stacked into walls.

Filled with enthusiasm, Bouvard and Pécuchet successively studied the Post Stone in Ussy, the Twin Stones in Guest, the Jarier Stone near Laigle, and others besides!

All these blocks, of comparable insignificance, soon bored them silly. One day, having viewed the menhir in Passais, they were about to turn back when their guide led them into a wood of beech trees, cluttered with masses of granite that looked like pedestals or monstrous turtles.

The largest one was hollowed out like a basin. One of the edges could be lifted, and from the bottom ran two grooves stretching to the ground. It was for the blood to run off, there could be no doubt! It would be too great a coincidence.

The roots of the trees were intermingled with the rough stones. A light rain was falling; in the distance, patches of fog rose like huge ghosts. Standing beneath the leaves, it was easy to imagine the high priests in gold tiaras and white robes, their human victims with arms lashed behind their backs—and at the edge of the basin the druidess observed the red stream, while all around her the crowd roared to the clamor of cymbals and of trumpets made from the horn of a urus.

Their plan was settled immediately. And one night, by the light of the moon, they headed back to the graveyard, skulking like thieves in the shadows of the houses. The shutters were closed and the courtyards still; not a dog was barking. Gorgu came with them, and they set to the task. The only sound was the noise of rocks struck by the

spade as it dug into the ground. The vicinity of corpses made them uneasy, the church clock gave off a continuous death rattle, and the rosette in the tympanum was like an eye on the lookout for sacrilege. Finally, they made off with the basin.

The next day they returned to the cemetery to see the traces of their operation. The priest, who was taking the air in his doorway, invited them to honor him with a visit; and having bade them enter his small parlor, he stared at them strangely.

In the middle of the sideboard, between the plates, was a soup tureen decorated with yellow bouquets. Pécuchet complimented him on it, not knowing what else to say.

"It's an old Rouen piece," answered the clergyman, "a family heirloom. Connoisseurs seem to admire it, especially Mr. Marescot." As for himself, praise God, he was not drawn to curiosities; and as they seemed not to have gotten the point, he stated flat out that he had witnessed them stealing the baptismal font.

The two archeologists stammered and felt very sheepish. The object in question was no longer being used.

No matter! They had to give it back.

Perhaps. But would he at least let them hire an artist to sketch it?

"Very well, gentlemen."

"Just between us," said Bouvard, "under the seal of confession, and all?"

The ecclesiastic, smiling, reassured them with a wave of his hand.

It wasn't he they were afraid of, but Larsonneur. When he visited Chavignolles, he would want the basin—and his gossip would reach even the government's ears. Out of precaution, they hid it in the bakehouse, then in the bower, in the hut, in a closet. Gorgu was getting tired of lugging it around.

Owning such an object linked them to the Celticism of Normandy.

Its origins were Egyptian. Séez, in the Orne region, was sometimes spelled Saïs, like the city in the Nile delta. The Gauls swore by the bull, an importation of the ox Apis. The term "Bellocastes," which applied to the residents of Bayeux, came from the Latin *Beli Casa*, the dwelling or sanctuary of Belus. Belus and Osiris—same deity. "There is no reason," says Mangon de Lalande, "why there should not be druid monuments near Bayeux." "This region," adds Mr. Roussel, "resembles the land where the Egyptians built the Temple of Jupiter-Ammon." Thus, there was a temple housing riches. All the Celtic monuments had some.

In 1715, relates Dom Martin, a certain Mr. Héribel unearthed in the environs of Bayeux several clay vases filled with bones—and concluded (following tradition and long-departed authorities) that this place, a necropolis, was Mount Faunus, where the Golden Calf had been buried.

But the Golden Calf had been burned and swallowed! Unless the Bible was mistaken.

First of all, where was Mount Faunus? The authors didn't say. The locals had no

clue. They would have to launch their own dig; and so they sent an application to the prefect, which received no reply.

Perhaps Mount Faunus had disappeared, and wasn't a mount but a tumulus. What was the significance of a tumulus?

Several of them contained skeletons, curled up like a fetus in the mother's womb. That meant that the tomb was like a second gestation for them, preparing them for the next life. Thus, the tumulus symbolized the female organ, as the erect stone was the male organ.

Indeed, wherever there are menhirs, an obscene cult has persisted, a testament to what took place in Guérande, Chichebouche, Croisic, or Livarot. In olden times, towers, pyramids, tapers, milestones, and even trees signified the phallus—and for Bouvard and Pécuchet, everything became a phallus. They collected whippletrees from horse-carts, chair legs, door bolts, pharmacists' pestles. When someone came to see them, they asked, "What do you think this looks like?" and then divulged the mystery. And if the person protested, they shrugged their shoulders, out of pity.

One evening, as they were musing about the dogmas of the druids, the priest rapped discreetly at the door.

They immediately showed him around the museum, beginning with the stained glass window, but they were impatient to get to their newest display, the phalluses. The clergyman stopped them, judging the exhibition indecent. He had come to reclaim his baptismal font.

Bouvard and Pécuchet begged him for just two more weeks, so that they could make a cast of it.

"The sooner the better," said the priest. Then he chatted about indifferent things.

Pécuchet, who had disappeared for a moment, slipped a napoleon into his hand. The priest recoiled.

"It's for the poor!"

And Abbé Jeufroy, blushing, stuffed the gold coin into his cassock.

Give back the basin, the sacrificial basin? Not a chance! They even wanted to learn Hebrew, which is the mother tongue of Celtic, unless of course it was the other way around? And they were planning to make a grand tour of Brittany—beginning with Reims, where they had an appointment with Larsonneur, to study the urn mentioned in the minutes of the Celtic Academy that supposedly contained the ashes of Queen Artemisia—when the mayor entered, hat on his head, without so much as a by-your-leave, like the vulgarian he was.

"This won't do, my lads! You have to give it back!"

"Give what back?"

"Don't get smart! I know you've got it hidden away!"

Someone had betrayed them!

They replied that they were holding onto it with the priest's permission.

"We'll see about that." And Foureau walked off.

He came back an hour later.

"The priest said no! Come with me so we can sort this out!"

They dug in their heels.

First of all, the priest didn't need the baptismal font, which to begin with wasn't even a baptismal font. They would prove it with a battery of scientific arguments. Then they offered to stipulate, in their wills, that it belonged to the town. They even offered to purchase it.

"And besides, it's my property!" Pécuchet repeated. The twenty francs accepted by Mr. Jeufroy was a binding contract—and if they had to appear before a judge, he would swear to it.

During the argument, he had looked over repeatedly at the soup tureen; and in his soul had grown the desire, the thirst, the itch for that piece of crockery. If the priest would let him have it, he would return the basin. Otherwise, no.

Out of exhaustion or fear of scandal, Mr. Jeufroy gave it up.

They placed it in their collection, near the Breton bonnet. The basin decorated the church porch; and they consoled themselves for the loss with the idea that the people of Chavignolles had no idea of its true worth.

But the tureen inspired in them a taste for earthenware—a new subject of study and excuse for canvassing the area.

It was the time when persons of good taste collected old Rouen dish-ware. The notary owned a few pieces, from which he derived a kind of artistic reputation, prejudicial to his trade, but for which he compensated with his sober demeanor.

When he learned that Bouvard and Pécuchet had acquired the tureen, he came by to propose a swap.

Pécuchet refused.

"Fine—subject closed!" And Marescot examined their ceramics.

The pieces, hung along the walls, were blue on a background of dirty white. Several displayed their cornucopias in faded greens and reds; shaving mugs, dishes, saucers—objects long pursued and brought home clasped to their bosom, sheltered in the folds of their frock coats.

Marescot complimented them, spoke of other styles of earthenware—the Hispano-Arabic, Dutch, English, Italian. And having dazzled them with his erudition: "May I see your tureen again?"

He made it ring with a flick of his finger, then contemplated the two S's painted under the lid.

"The mark of Rouen!" said Pécuchet.

"Oh! Oh! Rouen, properly speaking, had no mark. Before we knew about

Moustiers, all French pottery was said to be from Nevers. The same goes for Rouen today! Moreover, they make perfect imitations of it in Elbeuf!"

"I don't believe it!"

"They imitate majolica, don't they? I'm afraid your piece is worthless—and here I was, about to make a huge blunder!"

When the notary had left, Pécuchet collapsed into the armchair, prostrate.

"We shouldn't have given back the basin," said Bouvard. "But you lose your head! You always get carried away."

"Yes, I get carried away." And Pécuchet, snatching up the tureen, threw it as far away from himself as he could, against the sarcophagus.

Bouvard, calmer, gathered up the pieces one by one. And a moment later, the thought occurred to him: "Marescot might have been lying to us, out of jealousy."

"What?"

"I'm not convinced the tureen isn't authentic. What if it's the other pieces, the ones he pretended to admire, that are fakes?"

And the day ended in uncertainty and regret.

This was no reason to abandon their planned tour of Brittany. They even wanted to bring Gorgu, who could help them with their excavation.

For some time, he had been sleeping at the house, the quicker to finish his restoration of the chest. The prospect of travel didn't appeal to him. And as they were talking about the menhirs and tumuli they were hoping to see, he said, "I know of better ones. In Algeria, in the south, near the Bou-Mursoug springs, you find a bunch of them." He even described one tomb that had been opened in front of him by mistake, which contained a skeleton squatting like a monkey, its two arms around its legs.

Larsonneur, whom they told about this, claimed not to believe a word.

Bouvard studied the matter and brought it up again.

How is it that Gaulish monuments are shapeless, when the same Gauls were already civilized at the time of Julius Caesar? No doubt they were made by an even older people.

Such a hypothesis, said Larsonneur, was unpatriotic.

No matter! Nothing proved that those monuments were the work of the Gauls. "Show us something in writing!"

The academic got angry and stopped answering; which was fine with them, as they were sick of the druids.

If they didn't know what to think about ceramics and Celticism, it was because they didn't know history, particularly French history.

Anquetil's book was in their library. But the succession of do-nothing kings was not much fun to read about, nor did the villainy of the palace mayors rouse their indignation —and they dropped Anquetil, put off by the ineptitude of his reflections.

Then they asked Dumouchel for "the best history of France."

Dumouchel took out a library membership in their name and sent them Augustin Thierry's *Letters*, along with two volumes by Mr. de Genoude.

According to the latter, royalty, religion, and the national assemblies were "the backbone" of the French nation, which stretched back to the Merovingians. The Carolingians split off from them. The Capetians, siding with the populace, fought to maintain them. Under Louis XIII, absolute power was established in order to vanquish Protestantism, the last gasp of feudalism. And 1789 saw a return to the constitution of our ancestors.

Pécuchet admired these ideas.

They seemed pitiful to Bouvard, who had read Augustin Thierry first.

"What are you going on about, with your French nation! France doesn't exist, and neither do national assemblies! And the Carolingians didn't usurp a thing, not a thing! And the kings did not free the commoners! Read for yourself!"

Pécuchet had to bow to the evidence, and soon surpassed it in scientific rigor! He would have felt ashamed to say "Charlemagne" instead of "Karl the Great," "Clovis" instead of "Clodowig."

Nonetheless, he was seduced by Genoude, admiring how he made the two ends of French history meet, so much so that the whole middle part seemed like so much filler. And to clarify their thoughts on the subject, they delved into the collected volumes by Buchez and Roux. But the bathos of their prefaces and the amalgam of socialism and Catholicism nauseated them, while the overabundance of detail kept them from seeing the big picture. They fell back on Mr. Theirs.

It was during the summer of 1845, in the garden, under the bower. Pécuchet, a small bench under his feet, read aloud in his cavernous voice, tirelessly, stopping only to dip his fingers in his tobacco pouch. Bouvard listened, pipe in his mouth, legs spread, top button of his pants undone.

Some old-timers had spoken to them of '93, and recollections that seemed almost personal enlivened the author's flat descriptions. In those days, the highways were flooded with soldiers belting out "The Marseillaise." Women sitting in the doorways sewed canvas for tents. Sometimes a horde of men in red bonnets arrived, brandishing a discolored head at the end of a pike, its lank hair hanging down. The Convention Tribunal presided over a cloud of dust, in which furious faces screamed for death. When you walked at midday past the fountain in the Tuileries, you could hear the thud of the guillotine, like blows from a battering ram.

And the breeze rustled the vine leaves in the bower; the ripe barley swayed; now and then a blackbird chirped. Looking around them, they savored this tranquility.

What a shame that, even at the outset, the two sides couldn't get along. For if the royalists had thought like the patriots, if the Court had been more honest and its

adversaries less violent, many misfortunes could have been averted.

The more they discussed it, the more passionate they grew. Bouvard, with his liberal mind and sensitive heart, was a Constitutional, a Girondist, a Thermidorian. Pécuchet, bilious and authoritarian by nature, declared himself a sansculotte, even a Robespierrite.

They approved the king's death sentence, the most violent decrees, the cult of the Supreme Being. Bouvard preferred the cult of Nature. He would gladly have saluted the image of an earth mother, her ample bosom showering her worshipers not with water but with Chambertin wine.

Seeking more facts to support their arguments, they procured other works: Montgaillard, Prudhomme, Gallois, Lacretelle, and so on. And the contradictions among these books did not deter them in the least. Each one took only what would help his case.

Thus Bouvard had no doubt that Danton had accepted a hundred thousand *écus* to support motions that would sink the Republic. And according to Pécuchet, Vergniaud demanded six thousand francs a month.

"Not on your life! Explain to me instead why Robespierre's sister was receiving a pension from Louis XVIII?"

"Hardly! It was from Bonaparte! And if you're going to be that way, who do you think had a secret conversation with Egalité shortly before his death? I demand that they restore the deleted paragraphs to Campan's memoirs! The Dauphin's demise seems shady to me. The Grenelle powder-house killed two thousand people when it blew up! Unknown causes, they said—what a joke!" For Pécuchet was pretty sure he knew what these causes were, and he attributed every crime to aristocratic machinations and foreign gold.

In Bouvard's mind, "Rise to Heaven, son of Louis!" the virgins of Verdun, and breeches made of human skin were incontrovertible facts. He accepted Prudhomme's lists, a million victims on the dot.

But the Loire running red with blood from Saumur to Nantes, over a length of eighteen leagues, gave him pause. Pécuchet also harbored some doubts, and they held historians in distrust.

For some, the Revolution was a satanic event. Others proclaimed it a sublime exception. The defeated of each side were, of course, martyrs.

Thierry, apropos the Barbarians, demonstrated how foolish it was to say that such-and-such a prince was good or bad. Why not follow his lead in studying more recent periods? But history should buttress morality: we are grateful to Tacitus for having demolished Tiberius. After all, whether the queen had lovers, whether Dumouriez already planned on turning coat at Valmy, whether it was the Montagnards or the Girondists that convened in Prairial, the Jacobins or The Plain in Thermidor—what

difference does this make to the development of the Revolution, the origins of which are deep and the impact incalculable! Therefore it had to take place, had to be what it was. But imagine if the king had fled unimpeded, or if Robespierre had escaped or Bonaparte been assassinated: chance occurrences hinging on a less scrupulous innkeeper, an unlocked door, a sleeping sentinel—the whole course of the world would have changed.

They no longer had a single fixed idea about the individuals and events of that time. To form an impartial judgment, they would have to read every history, every memoir, every newspaper and manuscript, for the slightest omission could foster an error that would lead to others, and on unto infinity. They gave up.

But they had acquired a taste for history, a need for truth for its own sake.

Perhaps the truth was more easily uncovered in earlier periods? Surely the authors recounted events more dispassionately at a greater remove. And they delved into the good Rollin.

"What a load of hogwash!" cried Bouvard as of the first chapter.

"Hold on a minute," said Pécuchet, rummaging through the lower shelves of their library and the stacks of books belonging to the former owner, a fastidious old jurist and local wit. And having shoved aside a quantity of novels and plays, with some Montesquieu and translations of Horace, he found what he was looking for: Beaufort's volume on Roman history.

Livy attributes the founding of Rome to Romulus; Sallust gives the honor to Aeneas's Trojans. Coriolanus died in exile, according to Fabius Pictor, or through the scheming of Attius Tullus, if one were to believe Denys. Seneca maintains that Horatius returned victorious, while Dion Cassius says he was wounded in the leg. And La Mothe le Vayer expresses similar doubts about other figures.

There was no consensus about the antiquity of the Chaldeans, the century of Homer, the existence of Zoroaster, or the two Assyrian empires. Quintus Curtius made up stories. Plutarch contradicts Herodotus. We would have a very different image of Caesar if Vercingetorix had penned his own *Commentaries*.

Ancient history is obscure because there are too few documents. In modern history there are too many. And Bouvard and Pécuchet turned their attention back to France, began reading Sismondi.

Such a vast parade of men inspired a wish to know them better, to become immersed in their lives. They wanted to read the original sources, Grégoire de Tours, Monstrelet, Commines, all those authors with strange and enticing names. But events get mixed up if one doesn't know the dates. Fortunately, they had Dumouchel's mnemonic, a duodecimo volume bearing the epigraph: "Fun while learning." It combined the three systems of Allévy, Pâris, and Feinaigle.

Allévy transforms numbers into pictures, the number 1 being expressed by a tower,

2 by a bird, 3 by a camel, and so forth. Pâris appeals to the imagination by using a rebus: an armchair studded with screws, *clous à vis*, gives Clo + vis = Clovis; and as frying makes a sound like "ric, ric," some whitings in a pan call to mind Chilperic. Feinaigle divides the universe into houses, which contain rooms, each room having four walls with nine panels, each panel bearing an emblem. Thus, the first king of the first dynasty occupies the first panel in the first room. Using the Pâris system, a pharaoh on a mound gives the prince's name—"Pharamond"—and following Allévy's advice, by placing above this image a mirror, which means 4, a bird (2), and a hoop (0), you obtain 420, the date of his accession to the throne.

For greater clarity, they took their own house as a mnemonic basis, attaching to each of its parts a distinct fact; the courtyard, the garden, the surroundings, the entire region soon had no purpose other than to aid their memory. The milestones in the countryside defined certain periods, the apple trees were family trees, bushes became battles, the whole world became a symbol. They peered at walls searching for a host of absent things, ended up seeing them, then couldn't remember the dates they represented.

On top of which, dates are not always accurate. They learned from a school textbook that the birth of Jesus was actually five years earlier than is normally given, that the Greeks had three ways of counting the Olympiads, and the Romans eight ways of marking the start of the year. So many opportunities for misunderstanding, not to mention the confusion resulting from the different zodiacs, eras, and calendars.

Having stopped caring about dates, they moved on to disdaining facts. What counted was the philosophy of history!

Bouvard couldn't finish Bossuet's famous *Discourse on Universal History*.

"The Eagle of Meaux is a clown! He forgot all about China, India, and America, but goes on and on about how Theodosius was the 'joy of the universe,' how Abraham 'conversed with kings as an equal,' and how Greek philosophy derived from the Hebrews. His preoccupation with the Hebrews is getting on my nerves!"

Pécuchet shared his opinion and tried to get him to read Vico.

"But how can you agree," objected Bouvard, "that fables are truer than the truths of historians?"

Pécuchet endeavored to explain myths, got tangled up in the *Scienza Nuova*.

"Do you deny the plan of Providence?"

"I don't believe in it!" said Bouvard.

And they decided to put the matter to Dumouchel.

The professor confessed that he was now disenchanted with history. "It changes from day to day. They're contesting the Roman kings and the voyages of Pythagoras! They're disputing Belisarius, William Tell, and even The Cid, who according to the latest research was just a common bandit. It's enough to make you wish they wouldn't make any more discoveries—the Institute should establish some kind of canon,

prescribing what we should believe!"

As a postscript, he sent along some criteria pulled from Daunou's *Course*:

"To cite as proof the testimony of crowds is a bad proof, as they're not there to answer for it.

"Reject impossibilities. Pausanias was shown the stone swallowed by Saturn.

"Architecture lies. *Viz.* the Forum arch, on which Titus is called the first conqueror of Jerusalem, which was conquered before him by Pompey.

"Medals can be misleading. Under Charles IX, they struck coins with the hallmark of Henry II.

"Do not forget the talents of counterfeiters, the vested interests of apologists and detractors."

Few historians have followed these rules—but always in the interests of a particular cause, religion, nation, party, or system, or to discredit a king, sway the populace, or offer a moral example.

The others, who claim merely to be relating the facts, are no better. For it is impossible to say everything. One has to make choices. But one's selection of documents is guided by a certain viewpoint; and as this viewpoint varies, depending on the writer's situation, history will never be a fixed entity.

"That's sad," they thought.

Still, one could take a subject, read all the source materials, make an analysis—then condense it into a narration, which would be like a summary of the facts, a reflection of the whole truth. Such a project seemed feasible to Pécuchet. "What do you think of us trying to write a history?"

"I'd like nothing better! But of what?"

"That's just it, of what?"

Bouvard had sat down. Pécuchet was pacing back and forth across the museum when the butter pot struck his gaze, and stopping suddenly: "What if we wrote the life of the Duke of Angoulême?"

"But he was an idiot!" answered Bouvard.

"So what? Secondary figures sometimes have an enormous influence, and this one might turn out to have been a key player."

They could learn what they needed from books; no doubt Mr. de Faverges had some—him or one of his old gentlemen friends.

They pondered the project, debated it, and finally resolved to spend two weeks at the public library in Caen gathering background information.

The librarian brought them general histories and pamphlets, along with a color lithograph depicting, in three-quarter view, His Lordship the Duke of Angoulême.

The blue fabric of his uniform disappeared beneath his epaulettes, decorations, and the fat red sash of the Legion of Honor. An exceedingly high collar encased his long

neck. His pear-shaped head was framed by curly hair and narrow sideburns; heavy eyelids, a rather large nose, and thick lips gave his face an expression of insipid goodness.

When they had taken their notes, they drafted an outline.

Birth and childhood, not very remarkable. One of his tutors was Abbé Guénée, Voltaire's nemesis. In Turin, they made him cast a cannon, and he studied the campaigns of Charles VIII. Despite his youth, he was promoted colonel of a regiment of royal guards.

'97. His marriage.

1814. The British take Bordeaux. He follows behind and reveals himself to the inhabitants. Description of the prince's person.

1815. Bonaparte takes him by surprise. Immediately he calls the king of Spain, and Toulon, without Masséna, was handed over to England.

Operations in the South. He is beaten, but released on the promise of returning the crown diamonds, spirited away by his uncle the king.

After the Hundred Days, he returns with his parents and lives peacefully. Several years go by.

The Spanish wars. Once he has crossed the Pyrenees, victory follows the grandson of Henry IV everywhere. He captures Trocadero, reaches the Pillars of Hercules, crushes the factions, embraces Ferdinand, and heads back.

Arches of triumph, young girls presenting flowers, dinners in the prefectures, *Te Deum* in the cathedrals. The Parisians are in a giddy fever. The city stages a banquet for him. In the theaters, songs allude to his heroic deeds.

The enthusiasm wanes. For in 1827, in Cherbourg, a ball organized by subscription falls through.

As he is grand admiral of France, he inspects the fleet, which is about to leave for Algiers.

July 1830. Marmont tells him of the change in affairs. He gets so furious that he injures his hand on the general's sword.

The king places him in supreme command of the armed forces.

In the Bois de Boulogne he meets detachments from the lines, and cannot find a thing to say to them.

From Saint-Cloud, he rushes to the Sèvres bridge. The coldness of the troops does not shake him. The royal family leaves Trianon. He sits at the foot of an oak, unfolds a map, reflects, gets back on his horse, passes before Saint-Cyr, and sends the cadets an encouraging word.

In Rambouillet, the bodyguards bid farewell.

He sets sail and is ill for the entire crossing. End of his career.

Stress the importance of bridges. First he exposes himself needlessly on the Inn

bridge, he takes the Saint-Esprit and Lauriol bridges; in Lyon, the two bridges prove disastrous; and his fortune expires in front of the Sèvres bridge.

Table of his virtues. No need to praise his courage, to which he joined great political savvy. For he offered sixty francs to every soldier who left the Emperor—and in Spain, he tried to corrupt the Constitutionals with money.

His reserve was so profound that he consented to his father's planned marriage to the Queen of Etruria, to the formation of a new cabinet after the edicts, to abdication in favor of Chambord, to pretty much everything.

Still, he could be firm. In Angers, he broke the infantry of the National Guard, which, jealous of the cavalry, maneuvered its way into serving as his escort—to the point where His Highness found himself hemmed in by foot soldiers and his knees jostled. Still, he blamed the cavalry as the source of the disorder and pardoned the infantry, a true judgment of Solomon.

His piety was evident in numerous acts of devotion, as well as in his clemency in obtaining pardon for General Debelle, who had taken up arms against him.

Personal details—princely traits:

At Beauregard castle, as a child, he enjoyed digging a pond with his brother that can still be seen. Once he visited the hunters' barracks, asked for a glass of wine, and drank it to the king's health.

While walking, to maintain his pace, he repeated to himself: "One, two; one, two; one, two!"

A few of his sayings have been preserved:

To a delegation from Bordeaux: "What consoles me for not being in Bordeaux is standing here among you!"

To Protestants from Nimes: "I am a good Catholic. But I shall never forget that my most illustrious forebear was a Protestant."

To the cadets of Saint-Cyr, when all was lost: "Well, my friends! The news is good! It's going well, very well!"

After the abdication of Charles X: "Since they don't want me, let them fend for themselves!"

And in 1814, at the drop of a hat, in even the smallest village: "No more war! No more draft! No more tax on goods!"

His style was as good as his words. His proclamations are unsurpassed.

Count d'Artois's first declaration begins this way: "Frenchmen, the brother of your king has arrived!"

That of the prince: "I'm coming! I am the son of your kings! You are Frenchmen!"

Dispatch from Bayonne: "Soldiers, I'm coming!"

Another, in the midst of his defection: "Continue to wage the battle you have begun, with the vigor worthy of French soldiers. France expects it of you!"

Last, in Rambouillet: “The king has forged an alliance with the government in Paris. And everything leads us to believe that this alliance is on the point of being concluded.” “Everything leads us to believe” was sublime.

“One thing that bothers me,” said Bouvard, “is that we haven’t mentioned his affairs of the heart.”

And they noted in the margins: “Look into the prince’s love affairs!”

As they were about to leave, the librarian, on second thought, showed them another portrait of the Duke of Angoulême. In this one, he was dressed as a colonel in the armored cavalry, in profile, his eye even smaller, mouth open, with straight, fluttering hair.

How could they reconcile the two portraits? Was his hair straight or curly—unless he had pushed vanity to the point of having it curled?

A serious question, according to Pécuchet, for an individual’s hair is an expression of his inner nature. Bouvard claimed that one cannot truly know a man without knowing his passions. And to clarify these two points, they paid a visit to the Faverges chateau. The count was not there, which set them back. They returned home vexed.

The front door was wide open. No one in the kitchen. They went upstairs, and what did they find in Bouvard’s room? Mme. Bordin, looking around.

“Forgive me,” she said with a forced laugh. “I’ve been trying to find your cook for the past hour—I need her help, for my preserves.”

They found Germaine on a chair in the woodshed, dead asleep. They shook her. She opened her eyes.

“What now? Why are you still pestering me with your questions!”

It was clear that in their absence, Mme. Bordin had asked her quite a few.

Germaine emerged from her torpor and said her stomach wasn’t feeling well. “I’ll stay to take care of you,” said the widow.

Then they saw a large bonnet in the courtyard, its pinners flapping behind. It was Mme. Castillon, the farmer’s wife, calling, “Gorgu! Gorgu!”

And from the barn, the voice of their little maid answered clearly: “He ain’t here!”

She came down after five minutes, cheeks red, flustered. Bouvard and Pécuchet scolded her for taking so long. She unbuckled their gaiters without a word.

Then they went to see the chest. Its scattered pieces lay about the bakehouse; the sculptures were damaged, the doors broken. At the sight of it, faced with this new setback, Bouvard held in his tears and Pécuchet began to shake.

Gorgu, who showed up immediately afterward, explained the situation. He had just brought the chest outside to give it a coat of varnish when a runaway cow had knocked it over.

“Whose cow was it?” said Pécuchet.

“No idea.”

"Well, you must have left the door open, just like you did now! It's your fault!"

And besides, they were giving up on it: he had kept them waiting for too long. They had no further need of his presence or his services.

The gentlemen were being hasty. The damage wasn't so bad. In three weeks, it would all be finished—and Gorgu accompanied them into the kitchen, where Germaine, dragging her heels, was starting to prepare dinner.

They noticed a bottle of calvados on the table, three-fourths empty.

"Your work, no doubt?" Pécuchet said to Gorgu.

"Me? Never."

Bouvard objected: "You were the only man in the house."

"And what about the women?" replied the laborer, with a sidelong wink.

Germaine confronted him: "Why don't you just come right out and say it was me!"

"Of course it was you!"

"And I suppose it was me who destroyed the wardrobe, too!"

Gorgu sidestepped the question. "Can't you see she's drunk!"

They started bickering hotly, he pale and cocky, she red in the face, tearing out tufts of gray hair from under her cotton bonnet. Mme. Bordin spoke up for Germaine, Mélie for Gorgu.

The old woman exploded: "If this isn't an abomination! You spend entire days together in the grove, not to mention nights! You Parisian! You woman-eater! You think you can just come live in our masters' house and pull the wool over their eyes!"

Bouvard's eyes widened: "What wool?"

"I'm saying they're taking you for fools!"

"No one takes me for a fool!" cried Pécuchet. And outraged by her insolence, exasperated by all the disappointments, he sent her packing. She should just clear out! Bouvard had no objections—and they stormed out, leaving Germaine to break down in sobs over her misfortune, while Mme. Bordin tried her best to console her.

That evening, when things had calmed down, they reviewed the day's events, asking each other who had drunk the brandy, how the chest had been broken, why Mme. Castillon was calling for Gorgu like that—and whether he had dishonored Mélie.

"We don't even know what's going on under our own roof," said Bouvard, "and we think we can uncover the truth about the Duke of Angoulême's hairstyle and love affairs!"

Pécuchet added, "All these questions are so much more important and more difficult!"

From which they concluded that external facts are not the whole story. You also need to factor in psychology. Without imagination, history is flawed. "Let's send for some historical novels!"

Five

First they read Walter Scott. It was like the shock of a new world revealed.

The men of the past, who for them had been mere phantoms or names on a page, became living beings, kings, princes, sorcerers, servants, game wardens, monks, bohemians, merchants, and soldiers, who deliberated, fought, traveled, smuggled, ate and drank, sang and prayed, in castle armories, on the black benches of inns, in the winding city streets, beneath the awnings of workshops, in the cloisters of monasteries. Artistically composed landscapes surrounded the scenes like stage settings. Your eyes followed a horseman galloping along the strand, you breathed in the freshness of the wind in the broom. The moon lit lakes on which boats glided, the sun made armor gleam, and rain fell on leaf huts. Without knowing the models, they found these depictions lifelike, and the illusion was complete. And so the winter passed.

After lunch, they settled in the small living room, at either side of the fireplace; and facing each other, book in hand, they read silently. When evening fell, they went for a walk on the main road, dined hastily, and continued reading into the night. To shield themselves from the lamp light, Bouvard wore blue-tinted specs, while Pécuchet kept the visor of his cap tilted down over his forehead.

Germaine hadn't departed after all, and Gorgu came by from time to time to dig around in the garden. For they had given in out of indifference, a disregard of material things.

After Walter Scott, Alexandre Dumas entertained them like a magic lantern. His characters, alert as monkeys, strong as oxen, happy as larks, entered and spoke abruptly, jumped from rooftops to the street, received horrible wounds that soon healed, were believed dead and reappeared. There were floor traps, antidotes, disguises—and everyone blended together, ran around, handled situations, without a moment for reflection. Love preserved its decency, fanaticism was lighthearted, massacres brought a smile.

Made finicky by these two masters, they could not tolerate the jumble of *Belisaire*, the inanity of *Numa Pompilius*, Marchangy, or d'Arlincourt. The local color of Frédéric Soulié or of the bibliophile Jacob just seemed bland—and Mr. Villemain shocked them by having a Spaniard smoke a pipe on page eighty-five of his *Lascaris*, "a long Arabic pipe," in the middle of the fifteenth century!

Pécuchet consulted the *Universal Biography* and decided to correct Dumas from the

standpoint of scientific accuracy. The author, in *The Two Dianas*, was mistaken in his dates. The marriage of the dauphin François took place on April 24, 1558, and not on May 20, 1557. How did he know (see *The Page of the Duke of Savoy*) that Catherine de' Medici wanted to resume the war after the death of her husband? It was unlikely that the Duke of Anjou would have been crowned at night in a church, an episode that figures in *The Lady of Monsoreau.* More than any of them, *Queen Margot* was rife with errors. The Duke of Nevers was not absent: he voted at the council before the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre. Henry of Navarre did not follow the procession four days later. And Henry III did not return from Poland so quickly. Moreover, the miracle of the hawthorn, the balcony of Charles IX, and the poisoned gloves of Jeanne d'Albret were just the same old song. Pécuchet lost all confidence in Dumas.

He even lost any respect for Walter Scott, owing to the blunders in *Quentin Durward*. The murder of the Bishop of Liège was brought forward fifteen years. Robert de Lamarck's wife was Jeanne d'Arschel, not Hameline de Croy. He was not killed by a soldier, but put to death by Maximilian. And the figure of Charles the Bold, when they found his corpse, could not have looked threatening, since wolves had half-devoured it.

Bouvard, for his part, continued reading Walter Scott, but finally tired of having the same conceits repeated over and over. The heroine usually lived in the country with her father, and the suitor, a stolen infant, was restored to his rightful heritage and triumphed over his rivals. There was always a philosophical beggar, a surly squire, virtuous young ladies, wisecracking servants, endless dialogues, pointless modesty, and an utter lack of depth.

Out of a distaste for clutter, Bouvard took up George Sand. He was smitten by the beautiful adulteresses and noble lovers, would have liked to be Jacques, Simon, Benedict, or Lelio, and live in Venice! He sighed frequently, didn't know what was wrong with him, found himself a changed man.

Pécuchet, focusing on historical literature, studied theatrical plays. He absorbed two Pharamonds, three Clovises, four Charlemagnes, several Philippe Augustes, a host of Joan of Arcs, and a slew of Marquise de Pompadours and Cellamare conspiracies!

By and large, they were even stupider than the novels. For theater follows a conventional history, which cannot be altered. Louis XI will never fail to kneel before the images on his hat. Henry IV will be consistently jovial, Mary Stuart weepy, Richelieu cruel. Finally, all the characters are presented of a piece, in deference to simple ideas and out of respect for ignorance—so that the playwright ends up lowering rather than elevating, and instead of forming minds he dulls them.

Since Bouvard had praised George Sand, Pécuchet began reading *Consuelo*, *Horace*, and *Mauprat*. He was seduced by the championship of the oppressed, the social and republican aspect, the theses.

According to Bouvard, these interfered with the plot, and he asked the library to

send love stories.

Reading aloud by turns, they went through *The New Heloise*, *Delphine*, *Adolphe*, and *Ourika*. But the yawns of the listener overcame the reader, whose hands soon let the book drop to the floor. They criticized these novels for completely ignoring the social milieu, the time period, the characters' costumes. Only the heart seemed to matter. Feelings, feelings, and more feelings—as if there were nothing else in the world!

So they gave humor a try, such as *A Journey around My Room* by Xavier de Maistre or *Under the Lime Trees* by Alphonse Karr. In this kind of book, it seemed, one must always interrupt the narrative to talk about one's dog, one's slippers, or one's mistress. Such a lack of inhibition charmed them at first, then struck them as imbecilic—for the author erases his work by shining too much light on himself.

Needing drama, they plunged into adventure novels. The plots captivated them all the more in that they were convoluted, out of the ordinary, and farfetched. They strove to predict the outcomes, became very good at it, and soon grew bored with a diversion unworthy of serious minds.

The work of Balzac filled them with wonder, both as a kind of Babylon and as specks of dust under a microscope. New facets emerged from even the most banal events. They had not suspected modern life of being so profound.

"What an observer!" Bouvard would exclaim.

"Personally, I find him rather whimsical," Pécuchet finally concluded. "He believes in the occult, the monarchy, and the nobility, is enthralled by rogues, spends millions as if they were pennies, and his bourgeois aren't bourgeois, they're giants. Why inflate something so flat and describe so much foolishness? He's written a novel about chemistry, another one about banking, and another about printing presses, like that fellow Ricard did *The Coachman*, *The Water Carrier*, and *The Coconut Seller*. Before long we'll have one about every trade and region, then about every town and the story of every house and every individual in it, which won't be literature anymore but statistics or ethnography."

But Bouvard cared little about process. He wanted to learn, to further his knowledge of mores. He reread Paul de Kock, skimmed through an old copy of *The Hermit of the Chaussée-d'Antin*.

"How can you waste your time on such junk?" asked Pécuchet.

"Someday, these will be invaluable documents."

"Get out of here with your documents! I want something that fires my spirit, that lifts me above the miseries of this world."

And Pécuchet, striving toward the ideal, gradually converted Bouvard to tragedies.

The distant times in which they took place, the stakes of the conflicts, and the characters' situations inspired in them a sense of greatness.

One day, Bouvard picked up *Athalie* and recited the dream scene so well that

Pécuchet wanted to give it a try. From the first sentence, his voice became a kind of drone. It was monotonous, loud but unclear.

Bouvard, who had more experience, suggested that to limber up, he try going from the lowest note to the highest and then back down again—thus singing two scales, one rising, the other descending. He himself began indulging in this exercise, mornings in his bed, lying on his back, following the precepts of the Greeks. Pécuchet, meanwhile, did the same. And so they each brayed separately behind closed doors.

What they loved about tragedy was the emphasis, the speeches about politics, the perverse maxims. They learned the most famous dialogues of Racine and Voltaire by heart and declaimed them in the hallway. Bouvard, as if at the Théâtre Français, strode with his hand on Pécuchet's shoulder, pausing at intervals; and he rolled his eyes, spread his arms, cursed the Fates. He emitted excellent cries of pain in La Harpe's *Philoctete*s, a perfect hiccup in *Gabrielle de Vergy*—and when he played Denys the tyrant of Syracuse, he had a way of looking at his son and calling him "Monster, mine equal!" that was truly terrifying. It made Pécuchet forget his role. He was lacking in talent, not good will.

Once, during Marmontel's *Cleopatra*, he tried to reproduce the hissing of the asp, as the automaton invented by Vaucanson must have done. The failed attempt had them laughing all the way into evening. Tragedy went down in their esteem.

Bouvard was the first to tire of it, and he frankly demonstrated how artificial and impotent it was, how inane its devices were, how absurd the confidants.

They took up comedy, which is the school of nuances. One must take the sentence apart, underscore the words, weigh the syllables. Pécuchet couldn't manage it, and his Celimene was a complete flop. Moreover, he found the lovers awfully cold, the schemers deadly dull, the servants intolerable, Clitandre and Sganarelle as false as Aegisthus and Agamemnon.

There was still tragicomedy, or bourgeois tragedy, which featured devastated fathers, domestics saving their masters, rich folk offering up their fortunes, innocent seamstresses, and vile seducers, a genre that stretched from Diderot to Pixérécourt. All those plays preaching virtue shocked them as trivial.

The kind of drama that started in 1830 enchanted them with its movement, color, and freshness. They drew little distinction between Victor Hugo, Dumas, or Bouchardy; its diction was no longer pompous or refined, but lyrical, disordered.

One day, while Bouvard was trying to show Pécuchet the acting style of Frédéric Lemaître, Mme. Bordin showed up unannounced in her green shawl. She was returning a book by Pigault-Lebrun, the two gentlemen having been kind enough to lend her a novel now and again.

"Please go on!" For she had been there for a minute or so and was enjoying listening to them.

They begged off, but she insisted.

"Well!" said Bouvard. "I suppose there's no reason why we couldn't…"

Pécuchet claimed, out of false modesty, that they couldn't just act on the spot, without even costumes.

"Right! We'll need to dress up." And Bouvard looked about for some sort of object, found only the Greek cap, and grabbed it.

As the hallway was too narrow, they went down to the living room. Spiders ran along the walls, and geological specimens scattered about the floor had coated the velvet armchairs in white dust. They spread a towel on the least dirty of them so that Mme. Bordin could have a seat.

They had to serve up something good. Bouvard opted for *The Tower of Nesle*, but Pécuchet was wary of roles that demanded too much action. "She'd prefer something classical. *Phaedra*, for instance?"

"Done."

Bouvard set the scene: "It's about a queen, whose husband has a son by a former wife. She has fallen madly in love with the young man. Are you with me? Here we go!"

> Yes, Prince, I languish, I burn for Theseus,
> I love him!

And addressing Pécuchet's profile, he admired his bearing, his face, "that charming head," was sorry not to have met him on the high Grecian seas, would have liked to be lost with him in the labyrinth.

The tassel of the red cap bowed lovingly; and his trembling voice, his meek face implored the cruel one to take pity on his ardor. Pécuchet, turning away, panted to show emotion.

Mme. Bordin sat frozen, her eyes wide, as if before a magician. Mélie listened behind the door. Gorgu, in shirtsleeves, watched them through the window.

Bouvard began his second tirade. His acting expressed the madness of the senses, remorse, despair; and he leapt upon Pécuchet's imaginary sword with such violence that, tripping over one of the stones, he nearly fell on the floor.

"Pay no mind! At this point, Theseus arrives, and she takes poison!"

"That poor woman!" said Mme. Bordin.

Then they asked her to choose a play. The choice embarrassed her. She had seen only three plays: *Robert the Devil* in the capital, *The Young Bridegroom* in Rouen, and another in Falaise that was quite enjoyable, called *The Vinegar-Seller's Cart.*

Finally, Bouvard suggested the famous scene from *Tartuffe*, third act.

Pécuchet thought it necessary to provide some explanation: "You have to know that

Tartuffe…"

Mme. Bordin cut him short: "We all know who Tartuffe is!"

For the passage in question, Bouvard thought they should have a dress.

"The only thing that comes to mind is the monk's robe," said Pécuchet.

"Fine! Put it on!"

He reappeared with it, and a volume of Molière.

The beginning was mediocre. But when Tartuffe began caressing Elmire's knees, Pécuchet adopted the tone of a policeman:

> What is your hand doing there?

Bouvard quickly replied in a sugary voice:

> I'm feeling your garment—the fabric is so smooth.

And he rolled his irises, puckered his lips, sniffed, looked extremely lascivious, and turned toward Mme. Bordin.

The looks that man gave troubled her—and when he paused, humble and quivering, she almost answered him herself.

Pécuchet had to glance at the book:

> That statement is rather bold.

"I'll say!" she cried. "He's an out-and-out rascal!"

"Aren't I?" Bouvard said proudly. "But here's another one, in a more modern style." And unbuttoning his frock coat, he knelt on a paving stone and recited, head thrown back:

> The flames in your eyes have flooded my pupils.
> Sing me a song, as you used to, back then,
> In the evenings, when tears would fill your black eyes.

"That's like me," she thought.

> Let drink and be gay while the cup is still full:

This moment is ours and the future means nil.

"How funny you are!" And she emitted a little laugh that lifted her bosom and bared her teeth.

Is it not sweet
To love, and to know that I kneel at your feet?

He got down on both knees.
"Please stop!"

Oh! Let me sleep and dream at your breast
Doña Sol! My beauty! My beloved!

"At this point we hear bells, and a mountain dweller interrupts them."

"It's a good thing, too! For if not…!" And Mme. Bordin smiled, instead of finishing her sentence. Daylight was waning. She stood up.

It had rained shortly before, and the path through the beeches was slippery. It was better to go back through the fields. Bouvard accompanied her out to the garden to open the gate.

First they walked alongside the cordons, without speaking. He was still moved by his recitation; and she experienced in the depths of her soul a kind of surprise, a charm born of literature. Art, on some occasions, can move mediocre spirits, and worlds can be revealed by its most heavy-handed interpreters.

The sun had come out again, making the leaves glisten, throwing scattered patches of light onto the bushes. Three sparrows hopped about with little cries on the trunk of a felled linden. A flowering thorn bush spread its pink spray; lilacs bent under the weight.

"Ah, that does a body good!" said Bouvard, drawing in a deep breath.

"You get yourself so worked up!"

"I'm not saying I have talent, but when it comes to fire, that I've got."

"One can see," she replied—and, spacing out her next words: "that you were once…in love…in the past."

"Only in the past—you think so!"

She stopped. "I wouldn't know."

"What does she mean by that?" And Bouvard felt his heart racing.

A puddle in the middle of the sand forced a detour, making them climb up under the arbor. They spoke about the performance.

"What was that last piece called?"

"It was from *Hernani*, a drama."

"Ah!" Then slowly, speaking as if to herself: "It must be quite nice, having a gentleman tell you things like that—for real, I mean."

"I am at your service," answered Bouvard.

"You?"

"Yes, I!"

"You're joking!"

"Not in the slightest!"

And, having cast a look around them, he grabbed her around the waist and kissed her hard on the neck.

She turned very pale, as if she were about to faint, and leaned with one hand against a tree. Then she opened her eyelids and shook her head.

"It's passed."

He stood gaping at her.

The gate opened, she stepped up onto the threshold of the small door. A rivulet flowed on the other side. She gathered up the folds of her skirt and stood on the edge, uncertain.

"May I give you a hand?"

"*Oh*, no!"

"Why not?"

"You're too dangerous!"

And as she leapt, her white stockings showed.

Bouvard chided himself for having missed his chance. Bah! She'd be back—and besides, not all women were alike. You have to be forward with some, while with others that will get you nowhere. All in all, he was pleased with himself. And if he didn't confess his hopes to Pécuchet, it was for fear of snide comments, not out of delicacy.

From that day forward, they often recited for Mélie and Gorgu, wishing they had a local theater. The little maid enjoyed herself without understanding a word, astounded by the language, mesmerized by the drone of the verses. Gorgu applauded the philosophical tirades in the tragedies and anything that was for the people in the melodramas. Charmed by his taste, they considered giving him lessons, maybe turning him into an actor. The workman was dazzled by the prospect.

Word of their activities had spread. Vaucorbeil mentioned it to them banteringly. For the most part, people made fun of them.

They only thought more highly of themselves. They annointed themselves artists. Pécuchet began wearing a mustache, and Bouvard, with his round face and bald head, flattered himself that he "looked like Béranger"!

Finally, they decided to write a play of their own.

The difficult part was finding a subject.

They tossed around ideas while having lunch, followed by coffee, an indispensable liquor for the brain, then by a digestif or two. Then they lay down on their beds to take a nap. After that, they strolled around the orchard, went out to find inspiration, took long walks side-by-side, and returned home exhausted.

Or else they shut themselves indoors. Bouvard cleared off the table, set some blank paper in front of him, dipped his quill in the inkwell, and sat with his eyes glued to the ceiling; Pécuchet meditated in his armchair, legs stretched out and head lowered.

Sometimes they felt a shiver, like the breath of an idea. Before they could capture it, it had vanished.

But there are ways of finding subjects. You pick a title at random, and a story flows from it. You develop a proverb, or combine several adventures into one. None of these methods bore fruit. They skimmed through books of anecdotes, volumes of famous court cases, a stack of histories, all in vain.

And they dreamed of being performed at the Odéon, imagined the spectacle, missed Paris.

"I was meant to be an author, not to bury myself in the country!" said Bouvard.

"Same goes for me," answered Pécuchet.

An inspiration struck him: if they were having such trouble, it was because they didn't know the rules.

They studied *The Practice of Theatre* by d'Aubignac, plus a few works that weren't so outdated.

The key questions were discussed: Can comedy be written in verse? Does tragedy cross the line when it takes its subject from modern history? Must the hero be virtuous? What kinds of villains should it contain? At what point do horrors become excessive? The details should all point toward a single end; the interest of the plot should increase; the ending should correspond to the beginning—of course!

"Show us a new wonder in each line," says Boileau.

How does one show a new wonder?

> In all you Write, observe with Care and Art
> To move the Passions, and incline the Heart.

How do you go about inclining the heart?

So rules were not enough: you needed genius as well.

And even genius wasn't enough. Corneille, if you listened to the French Academy, had no understanding of theater. Geoffroy disparaged Voltaire. Racine was mocked by Subligny. La Harpe roared at the very mention of Shakespeare's name.

Disgusted by the classical critics, they gave the more recent ones a try, and read through theater reviews from the newspapers. What cheek! What thick-headedness! What a lack of integrity! Insults were heaped upon masterpieces, reverences made to platitudes—and the inanities of those who passed for wise, and the stupidity of others who were considered witty!

Perhaps they should trust in popular opinion instead? But often they didn't like the applauded works, while something about the booed ones appealed to them.

Thus, the opinion of professionals was misleading and the judgment of the crowd was not to be believed.

Bouvard posed the dilemma to Barberou. Pécuchet, for his part, wrote to Dumouchel.

The former salesman was astounded by how much the provinces had softened their brains. His old Bouvard was turning into a dope—in short, he "wasn't getting it." Theater was a consumer product like any other. You go to a show to enjoy yourself. Good means entertaining.

"You nitwit!" cried Pécuchet. "What entertains you might not entertain me—and everyone, even you, will get tired of it sooner or later. If plays are necessarily written to be performed, how come the best ones are always read?" And he awaited Dumouchel's reply.

According to the professor, a play's immediate reception proved nothing. *The Misanthrope* and *Athalie* were flops in their day. *Zaire* is no longer understood. Who today still talks about Ducange and Picard? And he recalled all the great successes of their time, from *Fanchon the Organ-Grinder* to *Gaspardo the Fisherman*, deploring the decadence of today's stage. This was due to a disregard for literature—or rather, for style.

So they wondered what style consisted of, precisely. And thanks to the authors Dumouchel had suggested, they learned the secrets of all the genres, how one conveys a majestic, temperate, or naïve tone, noble turns of phrase, vulgar language. *Dogs* can be elevated by *devouring*. *Vomit* is used only in the figurative sense. *Fever* is applied to passions. *Valor* works well in rhyme.

"What if we wrote in verse?" said Pécuchet.

"Later! Let's deal with prose first."

It is strictly recommended that a classical piece be chosen as a model. But each one has its drawbacks—and all of them have committed offenses not only against style, but also against language.

Such an assertion perturbed Bouvard and Pécuchet, and they began studying grammar.

Does our idiom contain definite and indefinite articles, as in Latin? Some say yes, others no. They didn't dare decide.

The verb must always agree with the subject, except in instances when the verb does not agree.

In earlier times, there was no distinction drawn between the verbal adjective and the present participle. The Academy has now created one, but it isn't easy to grasp.

They were amazed to learn that the pronoun *their* is used for people but also for things, while *that* is used for things but sometimes for people.

Should one say "that group of women looks good" or "look good"? A gang of thieves "rush forward" or "rushes forward"?

Other difficulties: "around" and "surrounding," between which Racine and Boileau saw no difference; "croak" and "caw," confused by La Fontaine, who could nonetheless tell a crow from a frog.

The grammarians themselves disagreed, some finding beauty where others saw errors. They admitted principles but ignored the consequences, proclaimed consequences but refused the principles, leaned on tradition but rejected the masters, and came up with bizarre refinements. Ménage, instead of *lentils* and *casserole*, recommends *nentils* and *casterole*; Bouhours prefers *jierarchy* over *hierarchy*; and Mr. Chapsal, the *eyes of the soup*.

Pécuchet was especially flabbergasted by Génin. Why should *des z'annetons* be better than *des hannetons*? *des z'aricots* better than *des haricots*? And under Louis XIV, they said *Roume* and *Mr. de Liounne* for *Rome* and *Mr. de Lionne*!

Littré delivered the coup de grace by stating that there had never been a definitive spelling, and there never would be.

They concluded that syntax was a fantasy and grammar an illusion.

Moreover, a recent manual of rhetoric proclaimed that one should write the way one speaks, and that the key to successful writing was having experienced and observed what one wrote about.

As they had experienced and believed they had observed, they deemed themselves ready to write. Plays were awkward because of the limitations on setting. Novels offered more freedom. To write one, they searched their own memories.

Pécuchet recalled one of his office managers, a thoroughly unpleasant individual, and he thought to avenge himself with a book. Bouvard had once known an old writing teacher at the café, a miserable drunk. How funny it would be to use him as a character.

At the end of the week, they decided to combine these two subjects into one—and, getting no further, they went on to the next: a woman who causes a family's downfall—a woman, her husband, and her lover—a woman who is virtuous by congenital defect—a social climber—a wicked priest.

They labored to relate these vague concepts to things provided by memory, removed, added. Pécuchet was interested in feelings and ideas, Bouvard in images and colors. And they began to argue, each one amazed at how obtuse the other could be.

Perhaps the science called aesthetics could help them through their differences. A friend of Dumouchel, a philosophy professor, sent them a list of works on the subject. They worked separately, communicating their reflections to each other.

First of all, what is beauty?

For Schelling, it is the infinite expressed by the finite; for Reid, an occult quality; for Jouffroy, an integral fact; for de Maistre, something that pleases virtue; for Father André, what suits reason.

And there exist several types of beauty. Beauty in science: geometry is beautiful. Beauty in mores: no one can deny that the death of Socrates was beautiful. Beauty in the animal kingdom: the beauty of the dog resides in its sense of smell. A pig cannot be beautiful, given its squalid habits; nor a serpent, for it evokes thoughts of baseness. Flowers, butterflies, and birds can be beautiful. Finally, the primary condition of beauty is unity in variety: that's the principle.

"Still," said Bouvard, "two crossed eyes are more varied than two straight ones but don't produce as good an effect—generally speaking."

They broached the question of the sublime.

Certain objects are sublime in and of themselves: the roar of a torrent, deep shadows, a tree felled by the tempest. A protagonist is beautiful when he triumphs, sublime when he struggles.

"I understand," said Bouvard. "The beautiful is beautiful, and the sublime is very beautiful. How can we tell them apart?"

"By means of tact," answered Pécuchet.

"And where does tact come from?"

"From taste!"

"What is taste?"

It is defined as a particular discernment, rapid judgment, the ability to distinguish certain relations.

"So in the end, taste is taste—and none of that tells us how to have it."

One must observe the rules of decorum. But decorum varies—no matter how perfect a work is, it cannot be irreproachable in every context. There is nonetheless an indestructible beauty, whose laws we ignore, for its genesis is obscure.

Since a given idea cannot be translated into every form, we must recognize the boundaries between the arts, and several genres within each of the arts. But combinations emerge in which the style of one encroaches into the other, at the risk of deviating from the goal, of no longer being true.

Truth too slavishly adhered to undermines beauty, and the preoccupation with beauty impedes truth. At the same time, without an ideal there's no truth; this is why types have a more sustained reality than portraits. Art, moreover, deals only in verisimilitude. But verisimilitude depends on who observes it, is relative, fleeting.

And so they lost themselves in these considerations. Bouvard had less and less faith in aesthetics.

"If it's not simply a joke, its rigor can be demonstrated by examples. Now, listen." And he read a note, which had demanded a lot of research on his part:

"Bouhours accuses Tacitus of not having the simplicity required of history. Mr. Droz, a professor, criticizes Shakespeare for mixing the serious with the comical. Nisard, another professor, finds that as a poet, André Chénier cannot compare with the seventeenth century. Blair, an Englishman, deplores Virgil's tableau of harpies. Marmontel moans about the licenses taken by Homer; La Motte rejects the immorality of his heroes; Vida is angered by his comparisons. In the final account, all the practitioners of rhetoric, poetics, and aesthetics are just a bunch of imbeciles!"

"You're exaggerating!" said Pécuchet.

He was assailed by doubts. For if mediocre minds (as Longinus observed) are incapable of faults, then faults are committed by the masters—and we should admire them? That's too much! Still, the masters are the masters! He strove to make the doctrines agree with the works and the critics with the poets, to seize the essence of the beautiful. And these questions so tormented him that his bile was churned up. He developed jaundice.

It was at its height when Marianne, Mme. Bordin's cook, came by to tell Bouvard that her mistress would like to see him.

They had not seen the widow since the day of the drama performance. Was this an advance? But why use Marianne as an intermediary? And that entire night, Bouvard's imagination ran riot.

The next day at around two o'clock he was pacing the hallway, peering occasionally out the window. There was a knock at the gate: the notary.

He crossed the courtyard, climbed the stairs, sat in the armchair—and, after a brief exchange of pleasantries, came to the point: tired of waiting for Mme. Bordin, he had decided to take matters into his own hands. The widow wished to buy Les Ecalles.

Bouvard felt a kind of chill run through him and went into Pécuchet's room.

Pécuchet didn't know what to answer. He was preoccupied, expecting Dr. Vaucorbeil at any moment.

Finally the widow arrived. Her lateness was explained by the complexity of her toilette: a cashmere stole, a hat, kid gloves, an outfit appropriate to serious occasions. After much beating around the bush, she asked if a thousand *écus* would be sufficient.

"A thousand *écus* for an entire acre? Never!"

She batted her eyelashes. "Ah! Not even for me?"

And the three of them sat in silence. Mr. de Faverges entered.

He carried a leather briefcase under his arm, like an attorney; and setting it on the table: "These are brochures! They have to do with election reforms, a burning question.

But here is something that belongs to you, no doubt?" And he handed Bouvard the second volume of *Memoirs of the Devil*.

Mélie had been reading it earlier in the kitchen; and since one must monitor the morals of such persons, he had thought it wise to confiscate the book.

Bouvard had lent it to his maid. They chatted about novels.

Mme. Bordin liked them when they weren't depressing.

"Writers," said Mr. de Faverges, "depict vice in flattering colors!"

"One has to depict something!" objected Bouvard.

"In that case, one need only follow the example…!"

"But it's not about an example!"

"At least, you'll agree that such books could fall into the hands of a young girl. I have one myself."

"And she is charming!" said the notary, with the face he had on wedding contract days.

"Well, because of her, or rather the persons around her, I prohibit these works in my house. For the people, my dear sir…"

"What have the people done now?" said Vaucorbeil, suddenly appearing in the doorway.

Pécuchet, who had recognized his voice, came in to join the company.

"I maintain," replied the count, "that certain reading matter must be kept from her."

Vaucorbeil retorted, "So you are not in favor of education?"

"Of course I am! On the contrary!"

"When every day," said Marescot, "the government is attacked."

"What's wrong with that?"

And the gentleman and the doctor began denigrating Louis-Philippe, bringing up the Pritchard Affair and the September laws against freedom of the press.

"And of the theater!" added Pécuchet.

Marescot couldn't contain himself: "Your theater goes too far!"

"I grant you that much," said the count. "Plays that glorify suicide!"

"Suicide is beautiful—Cato said so," Pécuchet objected.

Without responding to the argument, Mr. de Faverges condemned those works in which the most sacred things, like family, property, and marriage, were held up to ridicule!

"Really? And what about Molière?" said Bouvard.

Marescot, a learned man, retorted that Molière would no longer pass muster—and besides, he was a tad overdone.

"And frankly," said the count, "Victor Hugo was pitiless, yes pitiless, toward Marie Antoinette, dragging her through the mud in the guise of Mary Tudor!"

"What!" cried Bouvard. "Don't I, as an author, have the right…?"

"No, sir, you do not have the right to show us crime without putting a corrective alongside it, without providing a lesson."

Vaucorbeil also felt that art should have a goal: to strive for the improvement of the masses! "Speak to us of science, our discoveries, patriotism." He admired Casimir Delavigne.

Mme. Bordin praised the Marquis de Foudras.

The notary replied, "But what about language—aren't you forgetting about that?"

"Language? How so?"

"We're talking about style!" cried Pécuchet. "Do you find his works well written?"

"Certainly—they're very interesting!"

He shrugged his shoulders, and she blushed at the impertinence.

Several times Mme. Bordin had tried to steer the conversation back to her business proposition. It was too late to settle matters. She left on Marescot's arm.

The count handed out his pamphlets, suggesting they spread them around.

Vaucorbeil was about to leave when Pécuchet stopped him: "What about me, doctor?"

His yellow face was pitiful to behold, with his mustache and his black hair hanging beneath a badly tied scarf.

"Purge yourself!" said the doctor, giving him two little pats, as if to a child. "Too much excitement, too much art!"

This familiarity made him happy. It reassured him—and the moment the two friends were alone: "So you don't think it's anything serious?"

"No, of course not!"

They reviewed what they had just heard. For each individual, the morality of art rests on the side that flatters his own interests. People do not like literature.

Then they leafed through the count's flyers. All of them called for universal suffrage.

"Mark my words," said Pécuchet, "there's going to be havoc." For he saw everything in black, perhaps because of his jaundice.

Six

On the morning of February 25, 1848, the residents of Chavignolles learned, from a man coming from Falaise, that Paris was covered with barricades—and the next day, the Proclamation of the Republic was posted on the town hall.

This momentous event stupefied the bourgeois.

But when they learned that the Court of Appeals, the Court of Auditors, the Court of Commerce, the Board of Notaries, the Bar Association, the Council of State, the University, the generals, and Mr. Rochejaquelein himself had endorsed the provisional government, everyone breathed easier. And since they were planting Liberty Trees in Paris, the town council decided they needed one in Chavignolles as well.

Bouvard donated one, his sense of patriotism delighted by the triumph of the people. As for Pécuchet, he could only be pleased by the fall of the monarchy, as it confirmed his worst predictions. Gorgu, zealously following their instructions, dug up one of the poplars that lined the prairie below the Knoll and carted it to "Vaque Pass," the appointed spot at the entrance of town.

Well before it was time for the ceremony, the three of them were waiting for the parade.

They heard the beating of a drum, then a silver cross appeared; after that came two torches held aloft by cantors, and the priest in his stole, surplice, cope, and biretta. Four altar boys escorted him, while a fifth carried the pail with the holy water, and the sacristan brought up the rear.

The priest walked up to the edge of the pit in which the poplar stood, decked in blue, white, and red ribbons. Opposite him were the mayor and his two deputies, Beljambe and Marescot, along with the notables: Mr. de Faverges and Vaucorbeil; Coulon, the justice of the peace, with his sleepy face; Heurtaux, wearing a policeman's cap; and Alexandre Petit, the new schoolmaster, in his frock coat, a poor green frock coat, his Sunday best. The firemen, led by Girbal, saber in hand, formed a single line. On the other side shone the white plates of a few old shakos from the days of La Fayette—five or six at most, the national guard having long fallen into disuse in Chavignolles. Peasants and their wives, workers from the nearby factories, and kids crowded in back—and Placquevent, the local policeman, all five feet eight inches of him, paced back and forth with arms crossed, holding them in check with his stare.

The priest's speech was like that of any preacher in like circumstances. After

thundering against the kings, he glorified the Republic. Don't we say the "Republic of letters," the "Republic of Christ"? What could be more innocent than the first, or more resplendent than the second? Jesus Christ formulated our sublime motto: the tree of the people was the tree of the cross. For Religion to bear its fruits, it requires charity—and in the name of charity, the clergyman enjoined his brothers not to commit any disturbances, and to return peacefully to their homes.

Then he sprinkled the tree, beseeching God for his benediction. "May it grow and ever remind us of our liberation from servitude, and of this fraternity which is more beneficial than the shade from its branches! Amen!"

Voices repeated "Amen," and after more beating on the drum, the clergy, chanting a *Te Deum*, started back toward the church.

The curate's intervention had produced an excellent effect. The simple minds saw it as a promise of happiness, the patriots as a mark of deference, a homage to their beliefs.

Bouvard and Pécuchet felt he should have thanked them for their gift, or at least made some reference to it, and they said as much to Faverges and the doctor.

Who cared about such picayune matters! Vaucorbeil was delighted with the revolution, and so was the count. He despised the Orléans dynasty. We had finally seen the last of them, and good riddance! Everything for the people from now on! And followed by Hurel, his factotum, he went off to join the good priest.

Foureau walked with his head down, between the notary and the innkeeper, annoyed by the ceremony, fearful of a riot. Instinctively, he looked over toward the police, who were complaining to the captain about Girbal's ineffectiveness and the slovenly appearance of his men.

Some workers passed by on the road, singing "The Marseillaise." Gorgu, among them, brandished a stick; Petit marched alongside, eyes shining.

"I don't like this!" said Marescot. "All this shouting and commotion!"

"Oh well, after all," answered Coulon, "the lads are just having their fun."

Foureau sighed, "Some fun! With a guillotine at the end of it!" For he had visions of the scaffold, saw horrors in his future.

Chavignolles felt the backlash of the unrest in Paris. The bourgeois took out subscriptions to the newspapers. In the mornings, they mobbed the local post office, and the postmistress couldn't have handled it all without the captain, who sometimes came by to lend her a hand. Afterward, people congregated in the town square to talk.

The first argument broke out over Poland. Heurtaux and Bouvard felt they should come to its aid. Mr. de Faverges thought otherwise: "What right do we have to intervene? All of Europe would be unleashed against us. Let's not be hasty!" And as everyone concurred, the two Poland-supporters kept silent.

Another time, Vaucorbeil defended Ledru-Rollin's circulars. Foureau rebutted with the forty-five centimes.

But the government, said Pécuchet, had done away with slavery.

"What does slavery have to do with me!"

"Well, what about the abolition of the death penalty in political cases?"

"Good lord!" answered Foureau. "You want to abolish everything. Still, who knows? Already tenants are becoming so demanding!"

"So much the better!" Landowners were privileged, according to Pécuchet. "The man who owns a building…"

Foureau and Marescot cut him off, shouting that he was a communist.

"Me? A communist!"

And everyone began talking at once, when Pécuchet suggested forming a political club. Foureau had the nerve to reply that there would never be such a thing in Chavignolles.

Then Gorgu requisitioned rifles for the national guard, popular opinion having designated him as instructor. The only rifles they owned belonged to the firemen. Girbal was loath to give them up. Foureau wasn't eager to hand them over.

Gorgu looked at him. "Still, they say I know how to use one." For one of his talents was poaching, and the mayor and the innkeeper often bought a hare or rabbit from him.

"Very well, then, take them!" said Foureau.

That same morning, practice began.

On the yard in front of the church, Gorgu in blue overalls, a tie knotted about his waist, executed the movements automatically. His voice when he shouted orders was harsh. "Suck in that gut!" And immediately, Bouvard, holding in his breath, flattened his stomach and stuck out his rump. "I didn't say make an arch, for God's sake!" Pécuchet confused ranks with files, about right with about left. But the most pathetic of them all was the schoolmaster. Sickly and of meager height, with a collar of blond beard, he stumbled beneath the weight of his rifle, whose bayonet kept inconveniencing his neighbors.

They wore pants of every color, grimy shoulder belts, old uniform jackets that were too short to cover the shirttails on their flanks; and everyone claimed they "didn't have the funds to do any better." A collection was taken up to outfit the poorest among them. Foureau skimped, while the women distinguished themselves. Mme. Bordin gave five francs, despite her hatred of the Republic. Mr. de Faverges equipped a dozen men and never missed maneuvers, after which he settled behind a table at the grocer's and bought a few rounds for the first comers.

The powerful fawned upon the lower classes. The workers were put ahead of anyone else. People yearned for the privilege of being one of them. They were the new nobility.

The workers from that region were weavers, for the most part. Others worked at the calico factory or in the newly built paper mill.

Gorgu enthralled them with his glib tongue, taught them kick boxing, brought his friends home for a drink at Mme. Castillon's.

But the peasants were greater in number, and on market days Mr. de Faverges walked about the town square, asking after their needs, seeking to convert them to his way of thinking. They listened without answering, like Old Gouy, who was ready to accept any government so long as it lowered taxes.

With all his public speaking, Gorgu began making a name for himself. Perhaps they would elect him to the National Assembly!

Mr. de Faverges shared his opinions, but was still careful not to compromise himself. The conservatives wavered between Foureau and Marescot. But since the notary wanted to keep his practice, Foureau was chosen—a bumpkin, an idiot. The doctor was outraged.

Having scored low on his medical exams, he couldn't practice in Paris, and it was the awareness of his botched life that always made him look so woebegone. Now a bigger career was in the offing—what sweet revenge! He drafted a declaration of principles and read it to Messrs. Bouvard and Pécuchet. They praised him for it: their beliefs were the same as his.

Nevertheless, they wrote better, knew more history, and could serve in the Chamber of Deputies just as well as he could. So why not? But which of them should run? And a battle of tact began.

Pécuchet preferred his friend over himself. "No, no, you deserve it! You have more presence!"

"Perhaps," answered Bouvard, "but you have more nerve!"

And without resolving the problem, they drew up a plan of action.

Deputation fever had struck others as well. The captain dreamed of it beneath his policeman's cap, while smoking his pipe; and the schoolmaster, too, in his classroom; and the priest between prayers—so much so that he sometimes caught himself with eyes raised heavenward, murmuring, "Grant, O Lord, that I may be in the Chamber!"

The doctor, feeling encouraged, went to see Heurtaux and bragged of his chances. The captain didn't beat around the bush. Vaucorbeil was well known, of course, but not very popular with his colleagues, especially with the pharmacists. Everyone gossiped about him behind his back; the people didn't want a gentleman; his best patients were leaving him—and having weighed these arguments, the doctor rued his shortcomings.

As soon as he had left, Heurtaux ran over to Placquevent. Old soldiers should stick up for each other! But the policeman was devoted to Foureau, and flatly refused his support.

The priest convinced Mr. de Faverges that the time wasn't right: they had to give the Republic a chance to settle in. Bouvard and Pécuchet impressed upon Gorgu that he would never be strong enough to beat the coalition of peasants and bourgeois, filled him

with doubt, stripped him of his confidence. Petit, out of pride, had let his desire show. Beljambe warned him that if he lost, his ruin was certain. Finally, the monsignor ordered the priest to stay put. That left only Foureau.

Bouvard and Pécuchet contested him, bringing up his ill will about the rifles, his opposition to a club, his reactionary attitudes, his greed—and even managed to convince Gouy that he wanted to restore the old regime.

Hazy as this concept was for the farmer, he despised it with all the accumulated hatred stored in the souls of his ancestors over ten centuries, and he turned against Foureau all his relatives and those of his wife, brothers-in-law, cousins, grandnephews—a horde.

Gorgu, Vaucorbeil, and Petit contributed to the mayor's demolition; and with the ground thus cleared, Bouvard and Pécuchet, unbeknownst to anyone, were in a position to succeed.

They drew straws to decide which one would pose his candidacy. The straws settled nothing, so they went to consult the doctor about the matter.

He gave them a piece of news: Flacardoux, the editor of the *Calvados*, had decided to run. The two friends' disappointment was severe; each one felt the other's, in addition to his own. But politics had gotten under their skin. On election day, they watched over the voting tallies. Flacardoux carried it.

As a last resort, the count had tried for a position in the national guard, but failed to win the commander's epaulette. The citizens of Chavignolles preferred to appoint Beljambe.

This bizarre and unforeseen favor on the public's part dismayed Heurtaux. He had neglected his duties, contenting himself with occasionally inspecting maneuvers and making a few remarks. Still and all! He found it preposterous that they should choose an innkeeper over a former Captain of the Empire—and after the invasion of the Chamber on May 15, he said: "If that's how they hand out military ranks in the capital, then nothing would surprise me!"

The Reaction began.

People believed in Louis Blanc's pineapple purees, in Flocon's golden bed, in Ledru-Rollin's royal orgies—and since the provinces always claim to know everything that goes on in Paris, the burghers of Chavignolles had no doubts about these inventions, and accepted the most absurd rumors as true.

One evening, Mr. de Faverges went to find the priest to tell him about the Count de Chambord's arrival in Normandy. According to Foureau, Joinville was ready with his sailors to cut down the socialists. Heurtaux claimed that Louis Bonaparte would soon be named consul.

The factories sat idle. Huge mobs of poor people roamed the countryside.

One Sunday (this was in the early days of June), a policeman suddenly left for

Falaise. The workers of Acqueville, Liffard, Pierre-Pont, and Saint-Rémy marched on Chavignolles.

Shutters were closed. The town council met—and resolved, to prevent unfortunate incidents, that they would offer no resistance. The police were even confined to barracks, with the injunction not to show themselves.

Soon one could hear a sound like the rumbling of a storm. Then the battle hymn of the Girondins made the windows rattle; and arm in arm, men flowed from the Caen road, dusty, sweaty, and ragged. They filled the town square. A great brouhaha arose.

Gorgu and two comrades entered the council hall. One comrade was thin, with a sly face and a knitted vest from which rosettes hung. The other, black as coal, no doubt a mechanic, had close-cropped hair, thick eyebrows, and shoes made of cloth scraps. Gorgu was carrying his jacket over his shoulder like a hussar.

The three men remained standing, and the councilors, presiding around a table covered with a blue cloth, stared at them, pale with anxiety.

"Citizens!" said Gorgu, "we need work!"

The mayor trembled; he had lost his voice.

Marescot answered in his stead that the council would take it under immediate advisement; and when the companions left, they debated several proposals.

The first was to dig up rocks.

To use these rocks, Girbal suggested building a road from Angleville to Tournebu.

The one from Bayeux served exactly the same purpose.

How about cleaning out the pond? It didn't require that much work! Or else digging a second pond? But where?

Langlois felt they should create an embankment along the Mortins to guard against floods. It would be better, said Beljambe, to clear the briar patches. It was impossible to decide anything! To calm the crowd, Coulon went out to the peristyle and announced that they were setting up charitable works.

"Charity? Thanks but no thanks!" cried Gorgu. "Down with the swells! We demand the right to honest labor!"

The topic was in vogue. He made it into his personal platform and was roundly applauded.

Turning around, he bumped into Bouvard, whom Pécuchet had dragged there, and a conversation began. There was no hurry; the town hall was surrounded. The councilmen weren't going anywhere.

"Where will you get the money?" said Bouvard.

"From the rich! Besides, the government will order the public works."

"What if the work isn't necessary?"

"We'll do it in advance!"

"But salaries will come down!" countered Pécuchet. "When the need for labor

decreases, it's because there are too many products! And yet you're demanding that salaries go up!"

Gorgu gnawed at his mustache. "Still…with the organization of labor…"

"So the government will be in charge?"

Several people around them murmured, "No! Nobody in charge, ever again!"

Gorgu got irritated. "That's not the point! We have to guarantee the workers an income—or else institute credit!"

"How so?"

"Oh, I don't know! But we have to institute credit!"

"That's enough," said the mechanic. "I've had it with these two clowns!"

And he rushed up the front steps, shouting that he was going to knock the door in.

Plaquevent met him there, his hamstring flexed taut, fists at the ready. "Come on, I dare you!"

The mechanic pulled back.

The jeers from the crowd could be heard in the council room; everyone stood up, wanting to flee. The reinforcements from Falaise still hadn't shown up! They deplored the count's absence. Marescot twiddled a quill pen. Old Coulon whined. Heurtaux exploded that they should send in the police.

"Then order them out!" said Foureau.

"I don't have the authority."

Meanwhile, the noise grew louder. The square was covered in people. And everyone was watching the upper floor of the town hall, when at the middle window, beneath the clock, Pécuchet suddenly appeared.

He had cleverly taken the service stairs; and, hoping to follow in Lamartine's footsteps, he began haranguing the crowd: "Citizens!"

But his cap, his nose, his frock coat, his entire person inspired no respect. The man in the knit vest shouted back: "Are you a worker?"

"No."

"A boss, then?"

"Not that either."

"Well then, get lost!"

"Why should I?" Pécuchet shot back proudly.

And the next instant he disappeared from the window frame, yanked away by the mechanic. Gorgu came to his defense. "Leave him alone! He's all right!" They tussled with each other.

The door opened, and Marescot, on the threshold, proclaimed the municipal decision. It had been Hurel's idea.

The Tournebu road would get a new branch road to Angleville, which would lead to the Faverges chateau. It was a sacrifice that the community took on in the interests of

the workers. The crowd dispersed.

While heading home, Bouvard and Pécuchet's ears were assailed by women's voices. The servants and Mme. Bordin were all shouting at once, the widow the loudest —and seeing them:

"Finally! I've been waiting for you for three hours! Just look at my poor garden! There's not a single tulip left! There's filth all over the lawn! And I can't get him to move."

"Who?"

"Gouy!"

The farmer had shown up with a cart full of manure and strewn it haphazardly on the grass. "Now he's turning the soil! Hurry, go make him stop!"

"I'll come with you!" said Bouvard.

At the foot of the porch steps, a horse harnessed to a tipcart was nibbling a tuft of oleander. The wheels, brushing against the flowerbeds, had crushed the bushes, broken a rhododendron, trampled several dahlias—and clots of black dung embossed the lawn like molehills. Gouy was digging busily.

Once, Mme. Bordin had casually remarked that she wanted to till it. He had started in on the chore, and kept at it no matter how hard she tried to stop him. This was how he understood the right to labor, Gorgu's speech having gone to his head. Finally, it was only Bouvard's threats of violence that got him to leave.

Mme. Bordin refused to pay for his labor, and was keeping the manure as damages. She was a shrewd one; the doctor's wife, and even the notary's wife, who was of higher social standing, admired her.

The charitable works lasted a week. There were no further disturbances. Gorgu had left the area.

Nonetheless, the national guard was still standing. Every Sunday there was a review, sometimes military parades—and rounds every night. They alarmed the village.

They rang people's doorbells as a prank; walked into bedrooms where married couples were snoring together, then made lewd remarks; and the husband, waking up, had to go fetch everyone a drink. Then they returned to the station house to play a round of dominoes. They drank cider, ate cheese, and the sentry who bided his time at the door was always leaving it ajar. Indiscipline reigned, thanks to Beljambe's laxness.

When the June insurrections broke out, everyone agreed to "rush to Paris's aid," but Foureau couldn't leave town hall, nor Marescot his practice, nor the doctor his patients, nor Girbal his firemen. Mr. de Faverges was in Cherbourg. Beljambe had taken to his bed. The captain grumbled, "They didn't want me then, so too bad now!" And Bouvard was wise enough to hold Pécuchet back.

Patrols of the area spread wider.

Panic attacks broke out, caused by the shadow of a haystack or the shape of a

branch. On one occasion, all the national guardsmen fled: by the light of the moon, they had mistaken an apple tree for a man aiming a rifle at them. Another time, the patrol, halted under the row of beeches, heard someone in front of them in the dark.

"Who goes there?"

No answer!

They let the individual continue on his way, following him at a distance, for he might have had a pistol or a club. But when they reached the village, within range of reinforcements, the twelve men of the squadron all jumped on him, yelling, "Your papers!" They shoved him around, spat insults at him. The village guard had come out. They dragged him there—and by the light of the candle burning on the stove, they finally recognized Gorgu.

A wretched twill greatcoat cracked on his shoulders. His toes were visible through holes in his boots. His face was bloody from scratches and contusions. He had lost a phenomenal amount of weight, and he rolled his eyes like a wolf.

Foureau, who had come running, asked him what he was doing under the beeches, why he had come back to Chavignolles, and what he had been up to for the past six weeks.

It was none of their business. He was a free man.

Placquevent frisked him and found some cartridges. They decided to lock him up for the moment.

Bouvard tried to come to his defense.

"Don't even bother!" said the mayor. "We all know what you think!"

"But still…?"

"Ah, watch out, I'm warning you! Just watch out."

Bouvard didn't insist.

Gorgu then turned to Pécuchet. "What about you, boss, don't you have anything to say?"

Pécuchet hung his head, as if he doubted the man's innocence.

The poor devil gave a bitter smile. "And yet I defended you!"

At daybreak, two policemen transported him to Falaise. He was not brought before a military tribunal, but sentenced by the criminal court to three months in prison, for subversive statements inciting to the overthrow of society.

From Falaise, he wrote to his former employers to send him a character reference as soon as possible—and since their signature had to be certified by the mayor or his deputy, they preferred to ask Marescot for this little service.

They were shown into a dining room decorated with old china plates. A Boulle clock occupied the narrowest wall. On the bare mahogany table were two napkins, a tea service, and a pair of bowls. Mme. Marescot walked through the room in a blue cashmere dressing gown. She was a Parisian who was going stir-crazy in the country.

Then the notary entered, a wig in one hand, a newspaper in the other—and without further ado, he amiably affixed his seal, even though their protégé was a dangerous individual.

"But really," said Bouvard, "all this over a few words…!"

"I beg your pardon, my dear sir, but when words lead to criminal actions…!"

"Still," said Pécuchet, "where do we draw the line between innocent statements and culpable ones? What's forbidden today will be applauded tomorrow." And he criticized the harsh treatment being meted out to insurgents.

Marescot naturally put forward the defense of society, public safety, the supremacy of law.

"Excuse me," said Pécuchet, "but the rights of the one are just as valid as those of the many. And when someone turns the axiom back against you, your only response is force."

Instead of answering, Marescot raised his eyebrows disdainfully. So long as he could continue to draw up his deeds and live among his earthenware, in his comfortable little interior, all the injustices in the world couldn't move him. He had business to attend to, and excused himself.

His doctrine of public safety had left them indignant. Now conservatives were talking like Robespierre.

Another reason for astonishment: Cavaignac was losing support. The Mobile Guard was becoming suspect. Ledru-Rollin had been discredited, even in Vaucorbeil's eyes. The Constitutional debates didn't interest anyone. And on December 10, all the citizens of Chavignolles voted for Louis Napoleon.

The six million votes cooled Pécuchet's ardor for the people; and he and Bouvard studied the question of universal suffrage.

Since it belongs to everyone, it cannot have a mind of its own. An ambitious individual will always lead it, and the others will obey like a herd, since voters don't even have to know how to read. According to Pécuchet, this was why there was so much fraud in presidential elections.

"There's no fraud," answered Bouvard. "I think it has more to do with people's stupidity. Think of everyone who bought Revalescière tonic, Dupuytren hair restorer, chatelaine lotion, and so on! Those ninnies form the electoral masses, and we are subject to their will. Why can't one earn three thousand pounds with rabbits? Because putting too many in one place can cause death. In the same way, by the very fact of having a crowd, the germs of stupidity it contains spread from person to person, and the resulting effects are incalculable."

"Your skepticism is appalling!" said Pécuchet.

Later, in the spring, they met Mr. de Faverges, who told them about the Roman expedition. They would not attack the Italians. But we needed guarantees; otherwise,

our influence would be destroyed. There was nothing more legitimate than this intervention.

Bouvard's eyes widened. "But when it came to Poland, you argued just the opposite."

"It's not the same thing!" This time it concerned the Pope. And Faverges, in saying, "We want it, we will do it, we're counting on it," was speaking for an entire group.

Bouvard and Pécuchet were as disgusted by the counter-current as by the mainstream. In short, the plebs were no better than the aristocrats.

The right to intervene struck them as shady. They sought out its principles in Calvo, Martens, and Vattel—and Bouvard concluded: "You intervene to restore a ruler to the throne or liberate a population, or else as a precaution, to forestall a perceived threat. In either case, it's a violation of someone else's rights, an abuse of power, a hypocritical act of violence!"

"Still," said Pécuchet, "peoples stick together, just like individuals."

"Maybe so!" And Bouvard became pensive.

Soon the Roman expedition began on the domestic scene. Out of hatred for subversive ideas, the elite of the Parisian bourgeoisie ransacked printing presses. The great party of order took shape.

In their region, it was spearheaded by the count, Foureau, Marescot, and the priest. Every day at around four o'clock, they strolled back and forth through the town square, debating current events. Their main concern was distributing pamphlets with colorful titles: *It Is God's Will*, *Sharing the Wealth*, *Getting out of the Mire*, *Where Are We Going?* The best parts were the dialogues written in peasant style, replete with swear words and grammatical mistakes, to win the hearts and minds of the locals. A new law put peddling under the jurisdiction of the prefects—and they had just thrown Proudhon into Saint-Pélagie prison, a huge victory.

Liberty Trees were cut down nationwide. Chavignolles obeyed the order. With his own eyes, Bouvard saw his poplar being carted away in pieces. The logs would be used to warm the police, and they gave the stump to the priest—the very same man who had blessed it! What a travesty!

The schoolteacher made no secret of his feelings. Bouvard and Pécuchet praised him for it one day as they were passing by his door.

They next day he came to see them. And at the end of the week, they visited him.

Evening was falling. The children had just left, and the schoolmaster was sweeping his courtyard in his shirtsleeves. His wife, in a cotton bonnet, was suckling an infant. A little girl hid behind her skirt, while a hideous little tike played on the ground at her feet. Water from the wash she was doing in the kitchen ran from the bottom of the house.

"You see," said the teacher, "how the government treats us!" And he immediately launched into a tirade against the evils of capitalism. Wealth had to be democratized,

raw materials set free!

"I couldn't agree more!" said Pécuchet.

At very least, they should have recognized the right to public assistance.

"Another right!" said Bouvard.

No matter! The provisional government had been weak by not making fraternity a requirement.

"So try to make it one!"

As it was getting dark, Petit barked at his wife to go put a candle in his study.

Lithograph portraits of radical orators were pinned to the plaster walls. A crate full of books sat on a pine desk. For seating, there was a chair, a stool, and an old soapbox; he tried to laugh it off. But poverty reddened his cheeks, and his narrow temples denoted a ram-like stubbornness, an intractable pride. He would never give in.

"Here, this is what keeps me going!"

It was a pile of newspapers on a shelf—and in feverish tones, he exposed his declaration of principles: disarmament of the troops, abolition of the magistracy, equal wages, living standards. The way to bring about a true Golden Age, on the model of the Republic—with a dictator in charge, a tough customer who could get the job done!

Then he reached for a bottle of anisette and three glasses to drink a toast to the hero, the immortal victim, the great Robespierre!

The black robe of the priest appeared in the doorway.

Having given everyone a lively greeting, he turned to the teacher, and said almost under his breath, "So, where do we stand with the Saint Joseph business?"

"They wouldn't budge!" answered the schoolmaster.

"That's your fault!"

"I did my best!"

"Is that so?"

Bouvard and Pécuchet stood up out of tact. Petit made them sit down again; and speaking to the priest: "Is that all?"

Abbé Jeufroy hesitated. Then, with a smile to temper his reprimand: "We're finding that you have not been devoting enough time to Biblical history."

"Oh, Biblical history!"

"And what have you got against it, my good man?"

"Me? Nothing! Except that there might be more useful things to study than the story of Jonah and the Kings of Israel!"

"That's what you think!" the priest answered curtly. And without concern for the others present, or perhaps because of them: "An hour of catechism is too short!"

Petit shrugged his shoulders.

"You watch yourself, or so help me, you'll lose all your students!"

The ten francs a month these students brought in were the mainstay of his income.

But the cassock made him see red: “I don’t care—do your worst!”

“A man of my character does not do his worst!” said the priest calmly. “Only, I remind you that the Law of March 15 gives us jurisdiction over primary education.”

“Oh, I know it only too well!” cried the teacher. “It even belongs to police colonels! Why not the local cops, while you’re at it? That’s all we’d need!”

And he collapsed onto the stool, biting his fist, holding in his anger, suffocated by a feeling of powerlessness.

The priest touched him lightly on the shoulder. “I didn’t mean to upset you, my friend! Calm down! Let’s be reasonable! Easter will be here soon. I hope you’ll set a good example by taking communion with the others.”

“Ah, that’s too much! Me! Me! Submit to such nonsense!”

At this blasphemy, the priest blanched. His eyes blazed and his jaw trembled. “Shut up, you wretch! Shut your mouth! It’s your wife who launders the church linens!”

“Yeah, and so what? What’s she done to you?”

“She never comes to mass! Just like you!”

“You can’t fire a schoolmaster for that!”

“He can be relocated!”

The priest had stopped speaking. He was standing at the back of the room, in the shadows. Petit, head on his chest, was thinking.

They would end up at the other end of France, their last cent eaten up by the journey—and there they would find, under different names, the same priest, the same rector, the same prefect! All of them, all the way up to the minister, were like links in the chain of his oppression! He had already received one warning, and others would follow. What then? And in a kind of hallucination, he saw himself walking down a highway, a pack on his back, his loved ones next to him, his hand outstretched toward a passing coach!

At that moment, his wife in the kitchen was seized by a fit of coughing, the infant started bawling, and the kid began to wail.

“Those poor children!” said the priest in a gentle voice.

Their father broke down in sobs: “All right! You win! Whatever you want!”

“I’m counting on you,” answered the priest. And with a bow: “Gentlemen, I bid you good evening!”

The schoolmaster sat there with his face in his hands. He shrugged off Bouvard.

“No! Leave me alone! I wish I were dead! I’m a miserable wretch!”

The two friends returned home, congratulating themselves on their independence. The power of the clergy terrified them. It was now being used to shore up social order. Soon the Republic would vanish entirely.

Three million voters found themselves excluded from universal suffrage. Sanctions against newspapers were increased and censorship reestablished. Serial novels were

condemned, classical philosophy was labeled dangerous, the bourgeois preached the dogma of material interests—and the people seemed perfectly content.

Those in the countryside went back to their former masters.

Mr. de Faverges, who had property in the Eure region, was appointed to its legislature, and his reelection to the Calvados regional council was all but certain. He thought it wise to hold a luncheon for the local notables.

The vestibule in which three servants awaited them to take their coats, the billiards room and two salons all in a row, the plants in their china vases, the bronze statuettes on the mantelpieces, the golden beading on the wainscoting, the heavy drapes, the wide armchairs—all this luxury immediately flattered them as a gracious gesture that was intended for their sole enjoyment. And when entering the dining room, at the sight of the table laden with meats on silver trays, with the row of glasses before each plate, the hors d'oeuvres all around, and a salmon in the middle, everyone's face lit up.

There were seventeen of them, including two prominent farmers, the sub-prefect of Bayeux, and an individual from Cherbourg. Mr. de Faverges asked his guests to please excuse the countess, who was kept away by a migraine. And after the compliments on the pears and grapes that filled a basket at each of the four corners, the talk turned to the big news of the day: Changarnier's planned incursion into England.

Heurteaux was all for it, as a soldier; the priest, out of hatred for Protestants; Foureau, in the interests of commerce.

"You are talking," said Pécuchet, "as if this were the Middle Ages!"

"A lot of good came from the Middle Ages!" answered Marescot. "Our cathedrals, for instance…!"

"But, my dear sir, all the abuses…!"

"Regardless! The Revolution would never have happened!"

"Ah, the Revolution! The source of all our woes!" said the priest with a sigh.

"But everyone helped bring it about! Including—begging your lordship's pardon—the aristocrats themselves, by their alliance with the Philosophers!"

"What can I say! Louis XVIII legalized plundering! Since then, the parliamentary regime has been undermining the foundations…!"

A roast beef appeared, and for several minutes the only sounds to be heard were of forks and jaws, with the footsteps of servants on the parquet floor and two repeated words: "Madeira! Sauterne!"

The conversation was resumed by the man from Cherbourg. How does one stop oneself when one is sliding toward the abyss?

"In the time of the Athenians," said Marescot, "with whom we have certain affinities, Solon subdued the democrats by limiting land ownership."

"It would be better," said Hurel, "if they did away with the Chamber. All the chaos comes from Paris."

"We should decentralize!" said the notary.

"Extensively!" added the count.

According to Foureau, the municipality should have the final say, including the ability to bar outsiders from its roads if it deemed fit.

And as dish followed upon dish, game hen au jus, prawns, mushrooms, vegetable salad, roast meadowlark, a number of topics were discussed: the best system of taxation, the advantages of large-scale farming, the abolition of the death penalty. The sub-prefect made sure to quote this charming statement by a noted wit: "Let the assassinations begin!"

Bouvard was surprised by the contrast between what he saw around him and what was being said—for we always think that words should correspond to the setting, and that high ceilings breed lofty thoughts. Nonetheless, he was red-faced by dessert, and saw the fruit dishes only through a fog.

They had drunk Bordeaux, Burgundy, and Malaga wines. Mr. de Faverges, who knew his audience, uncorked some champagne. The guests, clinking their glasses, drank to his success in the elections—and it was after three when they passed into the smoking parlor to have their coffee.

A caricature from *Charivari* was lying on a console, between two issues of *L'Univers*. It depicted a citizen in a frock coat, from which emerged a tail that ended in an eye. Marescot explained what it meant, and everyone had a good laugh.

They consumed various liqueurs, and the ash from their cigars fell into the furniture padding. The priest, wishing to convince Girbal, attacked Voltaire. Coulon was dozing off. Mr. de Faverges declared his devotion to Chambord: "Bees are proof of the monarchy."

"And anthills of the republic!" The doctor couldn't take any more.

"You're absolutely right," said the sub-prefect. "The actual form of government is unimportant!"

"As long as there's freedom!" objected Pécuchet.

"An honest man doesn't need it," retorted Foureau. "Personally, I don't make speeches! I'm no journalist! And I maintain to all of you that France wants to be ruled with an iron hand!"

Everyone called for a savior.

As they were leaving, Bouvard and Pécuchet heard Mr. de Faverges saying to Abbé Jeufroy, "Obedience must be restored. If authority even has to be debated, it is in dire straits. Divine right—that's the only kind that matters!"

"Precisely, your grace!"

The pale rays of the October sun spread behind the woods, and a damp chill was in the wind. Walking over the dead leaves, they breathed as if they had just been set free.

Anything they had to say came out as an exclamation: "What idiots! What

baseness! How could you even imagine so much pigheadedness! First of all, what does 'divine right' even mean?"

Dumouchel's friend, the professor who had enlightened them about aesthetics, answered their question in a learned letter.

"The theory of the Divine Right of Kings was formulated under Charles II by the Englishman Filmer. This is what it says: 'The Creator gave the first man sovereignty over the world. It was passed down to his descendants, thus the King's power emanates from God.' 'He is in His image,' writes Bossuet. The paternal empire accustoms you to domination by a single individual. Kings were modeled after fathers.

"Locke refutes this doctrine. Paternal power is distinct from the monarchic, since any subject has the same rights over his children as the monarch does over his own. Royalty exists only by the people's choice—elections were even referred to in the coronation ceremony, in which two bishops, unveiling the new king, asked the nobles and the commoners if they accepted him as such.

"Power therefore comes from the people. The people have the right 'to do whatever they want,' says Helvetius; 'to change their constitution,' says Vattel; 'to rebel against injustice,' claim Glafey, Hotman, Mably, etc.! Saint Thomas Aquinas authorizes them to rid themselves of tyrants. And Jurieu says they do not even have to be justified in doing so."

Astounded by this axiom, they looked into *The Social Contract* by Rousseau. Pécuchet read all the way to the end—then, closing his eyes and with head thrown back, he analyzed it.

"We suppose a convention, by which the individual agrees to alienate his liberty. In return, the community commits itself to defending him against the inequities of Nature and makes him the owner of his possessions."

"Where is the proof of this contract?"

"Nowhere! And the community offers no guarantees. The citizens will be concerned exclusively with politics. But since trades are necessary, Rousseau recommends slavery. The sciences have sunk the human race. The theater is a corrupter and money baneful; and the State must impose a religion, on pain of death."

What! they thought. *This* from the god of 1793, the pontiff of democracy?

All the reformers copied Rousseau; and so they procured a copy of Morant's *Examination of Socialism*.

The first chapter discussed the doctrine of Saint-Simon. At the summit was the *Father*, pope and emperor all rolled into one. Inheritances were abolished, with all fixed and mobile property going into a public trust, which would be exploited hierarchically. Industrialists will govern the public fortune. But no reason to fear! The head of state will be "the man with the greatest love."

Only one thing was missing: women. The salvation of the world depends on the

arrival of womankind.

"I don't get it."

"Me neither!"

And they moved on to Fourierism.

All misfortunes result from constraints. Let attraction be acted upon unfettered, and harmony will result. Our soul enfolds twelve principal passions: five egoistic, four animistic, and three distributive. The first batch tends toward the individual, the second to groups, and the last to groups of groups, or series. The totality of these series is the Phalanx, a society of eighteen hundred persons living in a palace. Every morning, carriages transport workers into the countryside, and bring them back at night. They wear standards, hold festivals, and eat cake. Every woman, if she so desires, has three men: husband, lover, and genitor. For single men, dancing girls are provided.

"That's for me!" said Bouvard. And he became lost in daydreams about a harmonized world.

By regulating the climate, the earth will become more beautiful, and through the intermixing of races human life will last longer. They will direct clouds the way they now do lightning; rain will fall on the cities at night to wash them. Ships will sail the unfrozen polar seas beneath aurora borealises—for everything is produced by the conjunction of the male and female fluids, which spurt from the two poles, and the aurora borealis is a symptom of the planet's rutting, a prolific emission.

"He's lost me," said Pécuchet.

After Saint-Simon and Fourier, the problem came down to a matter of wages.

Louis Blanc wanted to ban foreign commerce, in the interests of the workers; La Farelle recommended the enforced use of machines; another called for reduced taxes on beverages, or to have guildships reestablished, or soup handed out. Proudhon imagined a uniform tariff, and gave the state a monopoly over sugar.

"Your socialists," said Bouvard, "are always pushing for dictatorship."

"No they're not!"

"Oh, yes they are!"

"You're absurd!"

"And you make me sick!"

They read through works that they knew only by reputation. Bouvard marked several passages, and, pointing them out: "Read for yourself! The examples he cites are the Essenians, the Moravian Friars, the Jesuits of Paraguay, and even the prison system. With the Icarians, lunch is over in twenty minutes, and women give birth in hospitals. Books may not be printed without the authorization of the republic."

"But Cabet is a moron."

"All right, then here's Saint-Simon: advertisers will submit their work to a committee of industrialists. Here's Pierre Leroux: the law can oblige citizens to listen to

an orator. And Auguste Comte: priests will educate the young, direct all spiritual endeavors, and encourage the powers that be to regulate procreation."

These documents devastated Pécuchet. That evening, at dinner, he said:

"I'll admit that there are ridiculous things in the writings of the utopians. Still, they deserve our love. The ugliness of this world horrified them, and to make it more beautiful they suffered every conceivable hardship. Just remember Morus, who was decapitated; Campanella, who was subjected to torture seven times; Buonarroti, with a chain around his neck; Saint-Simon dying of poverty, and so many others. They could have led perfectly easy lives. But no! They marched to their own drummer, heads held high, like heroes."

"Do you believe," answered Bouvard, "that the world can change because of the theories of one man?"

"What difference does it make!" said Pécuchet. "It's time we stopped wallowing in egotism! Let's find the best system!"

"And you think you can find it?"

"Why not?"

"You?"

And the laugh that seized Bouvard made his shoulders and belly shake in unison. Redder than the preserves, his napkin tucked under his armpits, he repeated "Ha! Ha! Ha!" gratingly.

Pécuchet left the room, slamming the door behind him.

Germaine called his name all over the house—and they finally found him huddled in the corner of his room in a wing chair, with neither fire nor candle, his cap pulled low over his eyes. He wasn't ill, just deep in thought.

When the spat had passed, they realized they were lacking a foundation to their studies: political economy. They looked into supply and demand, capital and rent, imports and prohibition.

One night, Pécuchet was awakened by the sound of a footstep in the hallway. Before going to bed, he had locked all the door bolts himself, as usual—and he called to Bouvard, who was deep asleep.

They sat frozen under their blankets. The noise did not start up again.

The servants, when asked, said they hadn't heard a thing. But when walking in the garden, they noticed the imprint of a boot in the middle of a flowerbed, near the latticework fence, and two slats of the trellis were broken. Apparently someone had climbed over it. They had to notify the police.

As the policeman wasn't at the town hall, Pécuchet went to check at the grocer's. Who did he see in the back room, next to Placquevent, sitting among the drinkers? Gorgu! Gorgu decked out like a bourgeois, treating everyone to a round.

The encounter with Gorgu was unimportant. Soon they were studying the question

of progress.

Bouvard had no doubt that progress existed in the scientific field, but in literature it wasn't so clear-cut—and if well-being increased, the splendor of life disappeared.

Pécuchet, to demonstrate his argument, took a sheet of paper: "I'm drawing a wavy horizontal line. Now, if people were to climb along it, every time it dipped they would lose sight of the horizon. But then it rises again, and despite all its ups and downs, they will reach the summit. And that is the image of progress."

Mme. Bordin entered. It was December 3, 1851, and she had brought them the newspaper.

Rapidly and side-by-side, they read about the call to the people, the dissolution of the Chamber, the imprisonment of the deputies.

Pécuchet went pale. Bouvard looked up at the widow: "Don't you have anything to say?"

"What do you want me to do about it?" They didn't even think to offer her a chair. "And here I was, thinking I'd make you happy. You two aren't being very nice today!" And she walked out of the house, shocked by their rudeness.

Surprise had left them dumbstruck. Then they went into the village to broadcast their outrage.

Marescot, who received them in the midst of his contracts, saw things differently. All that endless jabbering in the Chamber was finally over and done with, thank heaven. From now on, politics would be about business.

Beljambe was unaware of events, and didn't really care.

At the covered market, they ran into Vaucorbeil. The doctor had seen it all before: "There's no sense letting yourselves get worked up about it."

Foureau passed by them with a mocking: "The democrats are sunk!" And the captain, on Girbal's arm, called from a distance: "Long live the Emperor!"

But Petit would understand—and when Bouvard rapped at the window, the schoolmaster left his class. He found it highly amusing that Thiers was in jail. It avenged the people: "Ha, ha, deputies—now it's your turn!"

The use of deadly force to quell riots on the boulevard won the approval of Chavignolles. No clemency for the losers! No pity for the victims! If you rebel, you're a scoundrel!

"Thanks be to Providence!" said the priest. "And after that, to Louis Bonaparte. He has surrounded himself with only the most distinguished individuals! Count de Faverges will be a senator!"

The next day, they were visited by Placquevent. The two gentlemen had been shooting off their mouths. He cautioned them to keep quiet.

"Do you want my opinion?" said Pécuchet. "Since the bourgeois are vicious, the workers jealous, the priests obsequious, and the masses ultimately accepting of any

tyrant, so long as he leaves their snouts in the trough, Louis Napoleon did the right thing! Let him gag the people, crush them underfoot, wipe them out—it would serve them right for their hatred of the law, their cowardice, their ineptitude, and their blindness!"

Bouvard was pensive: "Progress—what a joke!" He added, "And politics is a fine mess!"

"It's not a science," said Pécuchet. "The military arts are better. At least you can see what's coming. Should we try that?"

"No thank you!" retorted Bouvard. "I'm fed up with the lot of it. I'd rather we just sell this dump and go to hell to live with the savages!"

"I'm with you!"

In the courtyard, Mélie was drawing water from the well.

The pump had a long wooden handle. To push it down, she bent forward—and they could see her blue stockings up to her calf. Then, with a rapid movement, she raised her right arm, turning her head slightly. And Pécuchet, watching her, felt something utterly new, a charm, an infinite pleasure.

Seven

THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED were filled with gloom.

They no longer studied for fear of disappointments. The people of Chavignolles avoided them, the few newspapers they could tolerate told them nothing—and their solitude was profound, their idleness complete.

Sometimes they opened a book, only to close it again: what was the point? On other days, they thought about cleaning the garden, but were overcome by fatigue after fifteen minutes; or looking in on the farm, but came back disgusted; or doing some work around the house, until Germaine wailed at them. They gave up.

Bouvard started drawing up a catalogue of the museum, only to declare that their knickknacks were stupid. Pécuchet borrowed Langlois's punt gun to hunt meadowlarks; the explosion from the first shot nearly killed him.

And so they lived in the boredom of the country, which can weigh so heavily when the monotonous white sky crushes a heart devoid of hope. You listen to the sound of clogs walking past the wall, or of droplets of rain falling from the roof to the ground. Now and then a dead leaf brushes against the windowpane, twists around, blows away. A faint knell is carried by the wind. In the depths of the stable, a cow lows.

They yawned in each other's faces, checked the calendar, watched the pendulum, waited for mealtimes; and the horizon never changed! Fields straight ahead, the church at right, a curtain of poplars at left. Their tips waved constantly in the mist, looking pitiful.

Idiosyncrasies that they once tolerated now bothered them. Pécuchet became annoying with his habit of putting his handkerchief on the tablecloth. Bouvard never put down his pipe, and yammered on while waddling about. Arguments arose over the preparation of certain dishes or the quality of the butter. When they conversed, they had other things on their minds.

One incident had profoundly upset Pécuchet.

Two days after the riot in Chavignolles, as he was walking off his political embarrassment, he had come to a path shrouded in leafy elms. Behind his back he heard a voice cry out, "Stop!"

It was Mme. Castillon. She was running along the opposite side and didn't see him. A man walking in front of her turned around. It was Gorgu—and they met up a few yards away from Pécuchet; only the row of trees separated them from him.

"Is it true?" she said. "Are you going off to fight?"

Pécuchet slid down into the ditch to listen.

"Well, sure I am!" answered Gorgu. "I'm going off to fight. What's it to you!"

"How can you ask me that!" she cried, wringing her arms. "What if you're killed, my darling? Oh, stay with me!" And her blue eyes implored him even more urgently than her words.

"Leave me alone! I have to go!"

She gave a bitter snicker. "I suppose *she* said it was okay!"

"You don't talk about her!" He raised his clenched fist.

"No, my friend, no! I'll be quiet, I won't say a word." And fat tears rolled down her cheeks and into the ruffles of her collaret.

It was noon. The sun shone on a landscape covered in golden wheat. Far in the distance, the tarpaulin of a coach slowly glided by. A torpor spread through the air—not a single birdcall, not one insect buzzing. Gorgu had cut himself a walking stick and was whittling off the bark. Mme. Castillon had bowed her head.

The poor woman was thinking about the vanity of her sacrifices, all his debts she had paid off, her plans for the future, her ruined reputation. Instead of complaining, she reminded him of the early days of their love affair, when every night she would go join him in the barn—to the point where one time her husband had thought he heard a thief and fired his pistol out the window. The bullet was still lodged in the wall. "From the moment I met you, you looked handsome as a prince. I love your eyes, your voice, the way you walk, the way you smell!" She added in a lower voice, "I am mad about every part of you!"

He smiled, his pride flattered.

She gripped his haunches with both hands—and with her head thrown back, as if in adoration: "My dearest heart! My dearest love! My soul! My life! What is it! Talk to me! What is it you want? Is it money? I'll find some. I was wrong! I was boring you. Forgive me! Order yourself some clothes at the tailor's, drink champagne, go out on the town! You can have anything! Anything!" She murmured in a supreme effort: "Even her!…so long as you come back to me!"

He leaned over her mouth, an arm around her waist to keep her from falling. And she babbled, "Dearest heart! Dearest love! You're so handsome! My God, you're handsome!"

Pécuchet panted as he gaped at them, stock still, the dirt of the ditch level with his chin.

"Don't go fainting now!" said Gorgu. "That's all I'd need, to miss the coach! There's a big plot afoot and I'm in on it! Give me ten *sous* so I can buy the coachman a drink."

She took a five franc note from her purse. "You'll pay me back soon. Be a little patient! Now that he's paralyzed! Just think! And if you want, we could go to the chapel

at Croix-Janval—and there, my love, I would swear before the Blessed Virgin to marry you, the moment he's dead!"

"Bah—your husband's never gonna croak!"

Gorgu had turned on his heels. She caught up with him, and clinging to his shoulders: "Let me come with you! I'll be your servant! You need someone. No—don't go! Don't leave me! I'd rather be dead! Kill me!"

She dragged behind his knees, trying to take hold of his hands to kiss them. Her bonnet fell off, then her comb, and her short hair flew in all directions. It was white at the temples. And as she kept staring him up and down, sobbing, with her eyes red and lips swollen, he was seized by exasperation and pushed her back.

"Get away from me, you old crone! Get lost!"

When she had stood up again, she tore the gold cross from around her neck, and throwing it at him: "Here, take it, you bastard!"

Gorgu kept walking, tapping the low-hanging leaves with his stick.

Mme. Castillon did not weep. Her jaw hanging slack, her eyes dead, she stood there without moving, petrified in her despair—no longer a living creature, but a thing in ruins.

What Pécuchet had just overheard was like the discovery of a world—an entire world!—with blinding lights, chaotic blossoms, oceans, tempests, treasures—and endlessly deep abysses. A terror emanated from it. But so what! He dreamed of love, aspired to feel it like her, to inspire it like him.

Still, he hated Gorgu, and in the Village Guard he had found it difficult not to betray his secret.

Mme. Castillon's lover humiliated him, with his svelte waist, his twin kiss curls, his downy beard, his victorious air; whereas Pécuchet's own hair clamped to his skull like a soggy toupee, his torso in its greatcoat looked like a bolster, he was missing two eyeteeth, and his face was harsh. He considered Heaven unjust, felt disowned, and now even his best friend didn't love him anymore. Every evening Bouvard went out and left him alone.

After the death of Bouvard's wife, nothing had stood in the way of his taking another—who today would have been pampering him, looking after his house. He was too old to think about that now!

But Bouvard inspected himself in the mirror. His cheeks were still rosy, his hair as wavy as ever, and not a tooth had budged. At the idea that he might still be attractive, he felt rejuvenated. Mme. Bordin surfaced in his memory. She had made advances to him, the first time during the haystack fire, the second at their dinner, then in the museum, during their theatrical recital, and lately she had come by three Sundays in a row, with no ill feelings from before. He therefore went to visit her, then went back again, intent on seducing her.

Since the day when Pécuchet had watched the little maid pumping water, he spoke to her more often, and whether she was sweeping the courtyard, hanging the laundry, or stirring the saucepans, he could not get enough of the joy of seeing her—surprising himself at his own emotions, like a teenager's. He felt all the same fevers and languors, and was tormented by the image of Mme. Castillon clutching onto Gorgu.

He questioned Bouvard on how libertines go about getting women.

"They give them presents! They treat them to a restaurant!"

"Fine, but what about after?"

"Some pretend to faint, so that you'll lay them out on the couch. Others drop their handkerchief. The best ones openly set a date with you." And Bouvard abounded in descriptions that fired Pécuchet's imagination like obscene etchings. "The first rule is not to believe anything they say. I've known some who beneath their saintly exteriors were regular Messalinas! The main thing is, you have to be bold!"

But boldness is not something you summon on command. Pécuchet kept putting off his decision, further hampered by the presence of Germaine.

Hoping she'd hand in her notice, he increased her workload, noted the times when she was tipsy, commented aloud on her lack of cleanliness and her laziness, and did such a good job of it that she was dismissed.

Then Pécuchet was free!

How impatiently he waited for Bouvard to go out! How his heart pounded once the door had shut behind him.

Mélie was sewing at a pedestal table near the window, by candlelight. From time to time she broke the thread with her teeth, then squinted to help glide it into the eye of the needle.

First he asked her what kind of men she liked. Was it, for instance, men like Bouvard? Goodness, no! She preferred slim ones. He then ventured to ask if she had any lovers? "Never!" Then, sidling closer, he contemplated her fine nose, her thin mouth, the contours of her face. He complimented her and exhorted her to be a good girl.

Leaning over her, he saw in her bodice white shapes that gave off a warm aroma, which made his cheeks flush. One evening, he put his lips to the unruly hairs on the nape of her neck, and felt a shockwave to the marrow of his bones. Another time, he kissed her under her chin, restraining himself from biting her oh-so-tasty flesh. She returned his kiss. The room began to spin, and he couldn't see.

He made her a gift of some ankle boots, and often treated her to a glass of anisette.

To spare her the trouble, he got up early in the morning, chopped the wood, lit the fire, and even pushed consideration to the point of shining Bouvard's shoes for her.

Mélie did not faint, did not drop her handkerchief, and Pécuchet didn't know what to do. His desire was made all the keener by his fear of satisfying it.

Meanwhile, Bouvard energetically courted Mme. Bordin.

She received his visits, squeezed a bit tight in her iridescent gray dress that crackled like a horse's reins, while fingering her long gold chain to maintain her composure.

Their conversations touched on the people of Chavignolles or her late husband, formerly a real estate agent in Livarot. Then she asked about Bouvard's past, curious to know about his "youthful follies," and incidentally his fortune, what interests bound him to Pécuchet.

He admired how she kept her house, and when he dined there he was impressed by the cleanliness of the service, the excellence of the cuisine. A series of dishes, highly flavorful and washed down at regular intervals by an old Pommard, brought them to dessert. They lingered over coffee—and Mme. Bordin, widening her nostrils, dipped her fleshy lip, lightly shadowed by black down, into the cup.

One day she greeted him in a low-cut gown. Her shoulders fascinated Bouvard. As he was seated in a small chair facing her, he began to run his hands along her arms. The widow bridled. He stopped, but pictured curves of marvelous abundance and consistency.

One evening, when Mélie's cooking had nauseated him, he felt a great joy upon entering Mme. Bordin's parlor. This was where he wanted to live!

The globe of the lamp, covered in pink paper, gave off a peaceful glow. She was sitting by the fire, and her foot peeked out from the hem of her skirt. After a few words, their conversation fell silent.

Still, she was looking at him, her eyes half closed, in a languorous pose, insistently.

Bouvard could stand it no longer! And kneeling on the wooden floor, he stammered, "I love you! Marry me!"

Mme. Bordin breathed heavily; then, with an artless air, she said he was surely joking, people would make fun, it wasn't sensible. The declaration made her dizzy.

Bouvard objected that they didn't need anyone's consent. "What's holding you back? Is it the dowry? Our linens have the same monogram, a B! We'll join our initials."

The argument charmed her. But an important piece of business kept her from making her decision before the end of the month. And Bouvard trembled.

She had the good grace to walk him home—escorted by Marianne, who carried a lantern.

The two friends had hidden their passions from each other.

Pécuchet counted on keeping his affair with the maid a secret. If Bouvard opposed it, he would take her away with him, even to Algeria, where life is inexpensive! But he rarely pondered such hypotheses, brimming with his love, without a thought for the consequences.

Bouvard planned to turn the museum into the conjugal bedroom, unless Pécuchet refused; in which case, he would live in his bride's house.

One afternoon the following week—it was in her garden; the buds were starting to open, and large areas of blue showed between the puffy clouds—she bent over to pick some violets and, offering them, announced, "Say hello to Madame Bouvard!"

"Really? Do you mean it?"

"Of course I mean it."

He went to take her in his arms. She pushed him away—"Silly man!"—then, growing serious, she warned him that she would soon be asking a favor.

"Name it, and it's yours!"

They set a date for the following Thursday to sign the marriage contract. No one was to know about it until the last moment.

"Agreed!"

And he left with his eyes raised heavenward, feeling light as a squirrel.

That same morning, Pécuchet had vowed to die if he did not win his maid's favors—and he had followed her into the cellar, hoping that the shadows would bolster his courage.

Several times she tried to leave, but he held her back to count the bottles, choose laths, or check the bottoms of the barrels. It lasted quite a while.

She was facing him, under the light of the basement window, standing erect, eyelids lowered, the corner of her mouth slightly upturned.

"Do you love me?" Pécuchet suddenly blurted.

"Yes, I love you."

"Well, then, prove it to me!"

Encircling her waist with his left arm, he began unlacing her corset with the other hand.

"Are you going to hurt me?"

"No, my little angel! Have no fear!"

"If Mr. Bouvard…!"

"I won't say a word! Don't worry!"

A stack of kindling was behind them. She let herself fall onto it, her breasts out of her blouse, her head thrown back. Then she hid her face beneath her arm—anyone else would have understood that she wasn't entirely inexperienced.

Soon afterward, Bouvard arrived home for dinner.

They ate in silence, each one afraid of giving himself away. Mélie served them, impassive as usual. Pécuchet turned his eyes away to avoid hers, while Bouvard stared at the walls, envisioning improvements.

A week later, on Thursday, he came home furious.

"That lousy bitch!"

"Who's that?"

"Mme. Bordin."

And he recounted that he had pushed his madness to the point of wanting to make her his wife. But it had all come to an end fifteen minutes ago, at Marescot's.

She claimed to have received Les Ecalles as a dowry, which was not his to give, as he had bought it, like the farm, partly with someone else's money.

"Indeed!" said Pécuchet.

"And I was stupid enough to promise her any favor she wanted! And that was it! So I dug in my heels; if she loved me, she would have given in!" The widow, on the contrary, had let loose with a string of insults, denigrating his physique, his potbelly. "Potbelly! I ask you!"

Pécuchet, during this time, had left the room more than once, and walked bowlegged.

"Are you in pain?" said Bouvard.

"Oh lord, yes!"

And having shut the door, Pécuchet, after much hesitation, confessed that he had just discovered he was suffering from a shameful illness.

"You?"

"Yes, me."

"Ah, you poor fellow! Who gave it to you?"

He blushed more deeply still, and said in an even lower voice, "It can only have been Mélie!"

Bouvard was flabbergasted.

The first thing was to fire the girl. She protested disingenuously.

Still, Pécuchet's case was serious. Ashamed of his depravity, he didn't dare go see Vaucorbeil.

Bouvard thought of asking Barberou. He sent details of the illness, for him to show the doctor who would treat it by mail. Barberou went at it zealously, convinced that it was for Bouvard, whom he called an old rogue, with his compliments.

"At my age!" said Pécuchet. "How sordid! But why would she do that to me?"

"She liked you."

"She should have warned me."

"Does passion ever think clearly!" And Bouvard complained about Mme. Bordin.

He had often caught her standing in front of Les Ecalles, in the company of Marescot, or in tête-à-tête with Germaine—so much scheming for a mere plot of land! "She's greedy! That's all it is!"

And so they ruminated over their misadventures in the small living room, by the fireside: Pécuchet while swallowing his medicines, Bouvard smoking pipe after pipe. And they discoursed on women.

Strange need! Is it even a need? They incite you to crime, to heroism, to mindlessness! Hell in a skirt, heaven in a kiss—warbling of a turtledove, writhing of a

snake, claws of a cat; treacherous as the sea, fickle as the moon. They repeated all the clichés to which women had given rise.

It was the desire to have one that had interfered with their friendship. They were filled with remorse. No more women, agreed? We can live without them! And they hugged each other tenderly.

They had to do something! And Bouvard, after Pécuchet was fully cured, decided that hydrotherapy would be just the ticket.

Germaine, who had come back after the other's departure, dragged the bathtub into the passageway every morning.

The two men, naked as savages, splashed each other with bucketsful of water, then scurried back into their rooms. They could be seen through the latticework, and some people were scandalized.

Eight

Pleased with their regimen, they decided to improve their constitutions with gymnastics. And having procured Amoros's *Manual*, they looked through the plates.

All those young men, squatting, standing, thrusting, bending backward, spreading their arms, clenching their fists, lifting weights, straddling beams, climbing ladders, twirling on trapezes—such a display of strength and agility roused their envy.

Still, they were discouraged by the splendid gymnasium described in the preface. For never would they have room for all that equipment: a hippodrome for riding, a pool for swimming, or a "climbing mountain," an artificial wall nearly one hundred feet high.

A wooden pommel horse with padding was too expensive; they gave up on it. The felled linden tree in the garden served as a balance beam. And when they had gotten good at walking it from end to end, they made themselves a vertical pole by planting a girder that had once been a strut on the espalier. Pécuchet managed to climb to the top. Bouvard kept slipping down, fell on his rump, and finally gave up.

The "orthosomatic rods" were more to his liking: two broom handles tied together with ropes, the first passing under his armpits, the second on his wrists—and for hours he stayed at that apparatus, chin raised, chest puffed out, elbows tight against his sides.

Since they had no clubs, the wheelwright turned them four pieces of ash that looked like sugarloaves ending in a bottleneck. The idea was to swing these clubs to the right, left, in front, and behind. But they were too heavy and slipped from their fingers, barely missing their legs. No matter: they persisted with the "Indian clubs" and, fearing they would crack, rubbed them down every evening with oil on a piece of old cloth.

Then they went searching for ditches. When they had found a suitable one, they set a long pole in the middle of it, pushed off with the left foot, landed on the other side, then started over again. As the land was flat, they could be seen from a fair distance—and the villagers wondered what those two curious creatures could be, leaping up and down on the horizon.

When autumn came, they took to indoor gymnastics; it was boring. If only they had the spring chair invented by Abbé de Saint-Pierre under Louis XIV! How was it made? Where could they find out? Dumouchel did not even bother answering them.

They set up a "brachial seesaw" in the bakehouse: two pulleys bolted to the ceiling through which passed a rope attached to a crosspiece at each end. As soon as they took hold of it, one pushed off the ground with his toes while the other lowered his arms to

the floor. The weight of the first pulled the second, who, loosening his grip on the rope, rose up in turn. In less than five minutes, their limbs were dripping with sweat.

To follow the instructions in the manual, they tried to be ambidextrous, even denying themselves the use of their right hands, temporarily. And even more: Amoros indicates which rhymes one should chant during maneuvers—and Bouvard and Pécuchet repeated Hymn no. 9 while marching:

> "A king, a just king, is a boon to the world"

as they beat their pectorals:

> "Friends, the glory and the crown," etc.;

at a racing pace:

> The timid beast is ours!
> The swift deer o'erpower'd!
> Oh yes, it will be won!
> Let's run! Let's run! Let's run!

And, panting like bloodhounds, they spurred themselves on with the sound of their voices.

One aspect of gymnastics that delighted them was its use as a means of rescue. But they needed children to learn how to carry them on stretchers; they asked the schoolmaster to lend them a few. Petit objected that their families wouldn't like it. They made do with giving the injured first aid: one pretended to faint, and the other carted him around in a wheelbarrow, observing every precaution.

As for military-style escalades, the author recommends the Bois-Rosé ladder, named for the captain who once took Fécamp by surprise by scaling the cliff. Following the illustration in the book, they fitted a cable with transversal rods and attached it under the roof of the shed. Once you have stepped onto the first rod and grasped the third, you swing your legs outward, so that the second, which a moment ago was against your chest, is now just below your thighs. You hoist yourself up, grab hold of the fourth, and continue on. Despite prodigious swaying of the hips, they found it impossible to reach the second level.

Perhaps it was less difficult to grab onto stones, as Bonaparte's soldiers had done at

the attack on Fort Chambray? And to make such a maneuver possible, Amoros recommended building a tower.

The ruined wall could take its place. They attempted an assault. But Bouvard, pulling his foot out of a hole too soon, got scared and was overcome by vertigo.

Pécuchet faulted their method: they had neglected to gauge the strength of the fingerbones, and had to start again from zero. His exhortations were in vain—and in his presumptuousness, he decided to try stilts.

Nature seemed to have predestined him for these. He immediately opted for the tallest model, with footrests four feet off the ground; and, happily up there, he paced around the garden like a giant stork out for its daily constitutional.

Bouvard at the window saw him stumble, then fall flat onto the beans, whose smashed runners cushioned his landing. They picked him up, covered in soil, nostrils bleeding, pale, and convinced he'd wrenched out his back.

Clearly, gymnastics was not ideally suited for men of their age. They abandoned it, no longer dared move for fear of accidents, and spent their days sitting in the museum, dreaming up other occupations.

The change in habits affected Bouvard's health. He became very heavy, huffed and puffed after his meals like a sperm whale, tried to lose weight, began eating less, and grew weak. Pécuchet, too, felt "drained," had rashes on his skin and spots in his throat. "This can't be good," they said. "This can't be good."

Bouvard went to fetch a few bottles of Malaga wine at the inn, to get his system up and running again. As he was leaving, he saw Marescot's clerk and three men carrying in a large walnut table for Beljambe. "Monsieur" sent his deepest thanks. It had performed beautifully.

And so Bouvard learned of the new vogue of séance tables. He teased the clerk about it.

Still, all over Europe, as well as in America, Australia, and India, millions of mortals were spending their time holding séances at similar tables—and discovering ways of making canaries prophetic, of giving concerts without a single instrument, and of corresponding via snails. The press, reporting this hogwash to the public with a straight face, only reinforced its credulity.

Spirit-rappers had infiltrated the Faverges chateau, and from there had spread to the village. It was mainly the notary who questioned these phantoms. Shocked at Bouvard's skepticism, he invited the two friends to an evening séance. Was it a trap? Mme. Bordin might be there. Pécuchet went alone.

Around the table were the mayor, the tax collector, the captain, other burghers and their wives, Mme. Vaucorbeil, Mme. Bordin herself, along with a former governess of Mme. Marescot's, a certain Mlle. Laverrière, a squint-eyed woman whose gray hair fell onto her shoulders in corkscrews, in the style of 1830. In an armchair sat a cousin from

Paris, wearing a blue suit and a smug expression.

The notary's two bronze lamps, his shelf of curios, his illustrated ballads on the piano, and his minuscule watercolors in exorbitant frames were normally the talk of the town in Chavignolles. But that evening all eyes were on the mahogany table. They would soon try it out, and it assumed the significance of something containing a great mystery.

Twelve guests took their places around it, hands outstretched, fingers touching. The only sound was the ticking of the pendulum clock. Their faces bespoke a rapt attention.

After ten minutes, several complained of a tingling in their arms. Pécuchet was uncomfortable.

"Stop pushing!" the captain said to Foureau.

"I'm not pushing!"

"You are too!"

"Oh, now really!"

The notary quieted them down.

From the effort of straining their ears, they thought they heard the wood creak. It was just an illusion—nothing had moved. The other day, when the Aubert and Lormeau families had come from Lisieux and they had expressly borrowed Beljambe's table, everything had gone so smoothly! But this one today refused to budge!… How come?

No doubt the rug was causing interference, and they moved into the dining room. They chose a large pedestal table, around which sat Pécuchet, Girbal, Mme. Marescot, and her cousin, Mr. Alfred.

The table, on casters, began to rotate clockwise. Without moving their fingers, the operators followed its motions, and all by itself it made two more turns. Everyone was stupefied.

Then Mr. Alfred said aloud: "Spirit, what do you think of my cousin?"

The table, rocking slowly, knocked on the floor eight times. According to a chart, on which the number of beats was translated into letters, this meant "charming." Bravos erupted.

Then Marescot, to tease Mme. Bordin, ordered the spirit to tell her exact age. The foot of the table knocked five times.

"What!" cried Girbal. "Five years old?"

"Zeros are silent," answered Foureau.

The widow smiled, inwardly miffed.

The answers to their other questions were harder to grasp, as the alphabet was too complicated. Better to use the board, an expedient that Mlle. Laverrière herself had used to take down direct communications from Louis XII, Clémence Isaure, Ben Franklin, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and others. These devices were for sale on Rue d'Aumale. Mr. Alfred promised to get one. Then, addressing the former governess: "But for now, how about a little piano? A mazurka!"

Two well-planted chords vibrated. He grabbed his cousin by the waist, disappeared with her, returned. They were refreshed by the breeze from her dress brushing the doorway as it passed. She threw her head back, he rounded his arm. They admired the one's grace, the other's dashing allure—and without waiting for the petit fours, Pécuchet retired, awestruck by the evening's events.

No matter how often he repeated, "But I saw it with my own two eyes!" Bouvard denied the facts. He nonetheless agreed that they should try it out for themselves.

For two weeks, they spent their afternoons facing each other, their hands on a table, then on a hat, a wastepaper basket, dishes. Each of these objects refused to budge.

Still, the phenomenon of séance tables is beyond doubt. The herd attributes it to spirits, Faraday to an extension of nerve impulses, Chevreul to unconscious efforts; or perhaps, as Ségouin claims, a certain magnetic current emanates from gatherings of individuals.

This hypothesis set Pécuchet thinking. He took from his library the *Hypnotist's Guide* by Montacabère, reread it carefully, and initiated Bouvard into the theory.

All animate objects receive and transmit the influence of the stars, a property analogous to the power of magnets. By harnessing this force, one can cure illnesses—that's the basic principle. Science has progressed since Mesmer's day. But it is still important to pour fluids and make passes, which first and foremost must put the subject to sleep.

"All right, then, put me to sleep," said Bouvard.

"Impossible!" said Pécuchet. "To receive and channel the magnetic action, you need to have faith." Then, looking at Bouvard: "Ah, what a shame it is!"

"What is?"

"Yes, if you wanted, with a little practice, there wouldn't be a better hypnotist than you!" For he had all the necessary attributes: a relaxing manner, a hearty constitution, and solid morals.

Bouvard was flattered by this newly discovered faculty of his. He began reading Montacabère on the sly.

Then, as Germaine had complained of a buzzing in her ears, he casually let slip one evening: "So, how about we try a little hypnotism?" She didn't refuse. He sat facing her, took her two thumbs in his hands, and stared fixedly at her, as if he'd been doing this all his life.

The good woman, a footrest under her heels, started by bending her neck. Her eyes closed, and very gently she began to snore. After watching her for an hour, Pécuchet said in a soft voice, "What do you feel?"

She jolted awake.

Lucidity was no doubt for a later stage.

This success emboldened them—and taking up the practice of medicine again, they

treated Chamberlan the verger for pains in his ribs; Migraine the mason, suffering from a nervous stomach; Old Mother Varin, who had an encephaloid tumor under her collarbone that required constant applications of meat plasters; a gout sufferer, Old Man Lemoine, who hung around outside cabarets; a consumptive; a hemiplegic; and many others besides. They also treated head colds and chilblains.

After exploring the illness, they gave each other a questioning look to determine which passes to use, whether high or low current, ascending or descending, longitudinal, transversal, bidigital, tridigital, or even quin-quidigital. When one grew tired, the other took over. Then, once back home, they noted their observations in the treatment log.

Their ingratiating manner won everyone over. Still, people preferred Bouvard, and his reputation spread all the way to Falaise after he cured "La Barbée," the daughter of Old Barbey, a former sea captain.

She felt something like a spike in her temple, talked in a hoarse voice, sometimes went several days without eating, then devoured plaster or coal. Her nervous fits started with sobs and ended in a flood of tears; and they had tried every remedy, from herbal teas to moxas—until, at her wits' end, she accepted Bouvard's offer.

Having dismissed the housekeeper and bolted the door, he began massaging her abdomen, pressing on the area near her ovaries. She manifested her well-being with sighs and yawns. He put his finger between her eyebrows at the bridge of her nose. All at once, she went limp. If he lifted her arm, it fell back again; her head kept whatever position he put it in; and her half-shut eyelids, vibrating spasmodically, revealed her eyes rolling slowly in their sockets. They stuck in the corners, convulsed.

Bouvard asked if she was in pain. She answered no. What was she feeling now? She pointed inside her body.

"What do you see there?"

"A worm!"

"How can we kill it?"

Her forehead wrinkled. "I'm trying… I can't! I can't!"

At the second séance, she prescribed herself a broth of nettles, and at the third some catnip tea. Her fits diminished, then disappeared altogether. It was like a real miracle.

These nasal manipulations did not work so well on other people. To encourage somnambulism, they planned to build a mesmeric baquet. Pécuchet had even gathered filings and washed about two dozen bottles, when an idea held him back. Among their patients would be persons of the opposite sex. "What will we do if they're overcome by uncontrollable erotic urges?"

This did not seem to bother Bouvard. But given the risk of gossip and possible blackmail, it might be better to forgo. They contented themselves with a harmonica and brought it with them to the houses, to the delight of the children present.

One day, when Migraine was feeling even worse, they ran to see him. The sound of the crystals was driving him mad. But Deleuze enjoins you not to heed complaints, and the music continued. “Enough! Please, enough!” Migraine cried.

“Have a little patience,” Bouvard repeated.

Pécuchet tapped more quickly on the glass strips, and the instrument vibrated, and the poor man was howling when the doctor showed up, alerted by the ruckus.

“You again?” he cried, furious at constantly finding them at his patients’ bedsides. They explained their magnetic method. The doctor thundered against hypnotism, a load of claptrap, whose effects were due solely to the imagination.

Still, people hypnotized animals. Montacabère said so, and Mr. Lafontaine had managed to hypnotize a lioness. They had no lioness. But chance offered them another beast, for the next morning at six, one of the plowmen came by to tell them they were needed at the farm, to see to a frantic cow. They came running.

The apple trees were in blossom, and the hay in the courtyard steamed in the rising sun. At the edge of the pond, half covered by a blanket, a cow was lowing, shivering from the bucketsful of water they were throwing on its body. Disproportionately swollen, it looked like a hippopotamus.

No doubt it had swallowed “venom” while grazing in the clover. Old Gouy and his wife were very sorry—for the veterinarian couldn’t come, and a wheelwright who knew the correct words to use against swelling couldn’t be bothered. But these gentlemen, who were so famously well-read, must know a secret or two.

Having rolled up their sleeves, they positioned themselves, one at the cow’s horns, the other behind its rump—and with great internal efforts and frantic gesticulations, they spread their fingers and slathered the animal with streams of fluid, while the farmer, his wife, their boy, and the neighbors watched them in near-terror.

The gurgling sound they heard in the cow’s belly provoked rumblings in the depths of their own entrails. The animal broke wind. Pécuchet said, “That opens a door to hope! An emergence, perhaps?”

The emergence occurred. The hope spewed out in a lump of yellow sludge, exploding with the force of a grenade. Everyone breathed easier; the cow deflated. An hour later, the swelling was gone.

This was surely not the effect of imagination. So the magnetic fluid must contain particular properties. It lets itself be contained in objects, and therefore it could be extracted from them without becoming diluted. Such a method would spare them having to travel. They adopted it; and they sent their clients magnetized tokens, magnetized handkerchiefs, magnetized water, magnetized bread.

Then, taking their studies further, they abandoned passes altogether for Puységur’s system, which replaces the hypnotist with an old tree, with a rope tied around its trunk.

A pear tree in their farmyard seemed ideal. They primed it by giving it several good

hugs. A bench was set up under the branches. Their regular clients lined up on it—and they obtained such marvelous results that to convince Vaucorbeil, they invited him to a séance, along with the other town notables. Not one of them failed to show.

Germaine greeted them in the small parlor, asking them to "please be excused," her masters would arrive any moment now.

From time to time, the doorbell rang: these were the patients, whom Germaine let in by another entrance. Elbowing each other, the guests pointed out the dusty windows, the stains on the woodwork, the flaking paint—and the garden was a disgrace! Dead trees everywhere! Two rods in front of the break in the wall barred the orchard.

Pécuchet entered—"At your service, gentlemen!"—and behind him, under the Edouin pear, they saw several persons seated.

Chamberlan, beardless as a priest, in a short twill cassock and a leather skullcap, was wracked by shivers caused by his rib pain. Migraine, still suffering from stomach cramps, grimaced beside him. Old Mother Varin, to hide her tumor, wore a shawl wrapped several times around her. Old Man Lemoine, barefooted in slippers, had crutches under his armpits. And La Barbée in her Sunday outfit was pale, remarkably so.

On the other side of the tree, they found more people. An albino woman sponged the suppurating glands in her neck. The face of a little girl half-disappeared behind dark glasses. An old man with spasms, whose spine was deformed by contractions, kept jerking into Marcel, a kind of idiot wearing a ragged smock and patched trousers. His badly sewn harelip showed his incisors, and strips of cloth swaddled his cheek, which was swollen by an enormous tumor.

Each of them was holding onto a thread that hung from the tree. The birds were singing; the smell of warm hay floated in the air; the sun passed between the branches. They walked over softly.

Still, the subjects, instead of falling asleep, sat with eyes wide.

"So far, this isn't much fun," said Foureau. "Go ahead and start, I'll just be a moment." And he came back smoking an Abd El-Kader, a last remnant of the pipe gate.

Pécuchet, remembering an excellent method of hypnotism, put all the patients' noses in his mouth and breathed in their exhalation to absorb their electricity—while at the same time Bouvard hugged the tree tightly, in an attempt to raise the fluid level.

The mason stopped hiccupping, the verger became less agitated, the man with the spasms stopped jerking. One could now come near them, subject them to any test.

The doctor, with his lancet, pricked Chamberlan under the ear, which made him twitch slightly. The others were clearly more sensitive. The man with gout gave a scream. As for La Barbée, she smiled as if in a dream, and a line of blood ran under her jaw. Foureau, to try it out himself, tried to grab the lancet, and when the doctor refused

he gave La Barbée a hard pinch. The captain tickled her nostrils with a feather; the taxman went to stick a pin in her.

"Oh, leave her alone!" said Vaucorbeil. "Nothing surprising, after all! She's a hysteric! The devil himself couldn't make heads or tails of it!"

"This one," said Pécuchet, pointing to Victoire, the woman with scrofula, "is a medium! She recognizes ailments and suggests remedies."

Langlois was dying to consult her about his catarrh, but didn't dare. Coulon, a hardier soul, asked about his rheumatism.

Pécuchet placed his right hand in Victoire's left—and with eyes still closed, her cheeks a bit flushed, lips trembling, the somnambulist, after some meandering, prescribed *valum becum*.

She had worked for a pharmacist in Bayeux. Vaucorbeil inferred that she meant "album graecum," words she might have glimpsed in the apothecary.

Then he turned to Old Lemoine, who according to Bouvard could see through opaque objects.

He was a former schoolteacher who had fallen on hard times. White hair hung all around his face; and with his back against the tree, palms open, he slept in the sunlight, exuding true majesty.

The doctor tied a scarf double around his eyes; and Bouvard, holding a newspaper in front of him, commanded: "Read!"

Lemoine lowered his forehead, moved his facial muscles, then threw his head back, and finally uttered, "Cons-ti-tu-tion-al."

But if one is clever, one can peek around any blindfold!

The doctor's denials disgusted Pécuchet. He took a chance and claimed that La Barbée could describe what was happening in his own house at that very moment.

"You're on," answered the doctor; and having taken out his watch: "What is my wife doing?"

La Barbée gave a long pause. Then, grumpily: "Huh? What's that? Ah, I've got it. She's sewing ribbons onto a straw hat."

Vaucorbeil ripped a page from his notebook and wrote a note, which Marescot's clerk rushed off to deliver.

The séance was over. The patients went away. In the final account, Bouvard and Pécuchet had not succeeded. Was it because of the temperature, or the smell of tobacco, or Abbé Jeufroy's umbrella, which had a copper knob—a metal that interferes with fluid emission? Vaucorbeil shrugged his shoulders.

Still, he couldn't dispute the good faith of Messrs. Deleuze, Bertrand, Morin, and Jules Cloquet, who maintained that somnambulists have predicted events and suffered cruel torments without feeling any pain.

The priest reported even more remarkable stories. A missionary had seen Brahmins

walk across an archway upside-down, and the Grand Lama of Tibet slit open his own entrails to pronounce oracles.

"Are you putting me on?" said the doctor.

"Hardly."

"Come on now! This is a joke!"

And, the conversation having taken another path, everyone had a story to tell.

"Me," said the grocer, "I had a dog who always got sick whenever the month started on a Friday."

"I grew up in a family of fourteen children," answered the justice of the peace. "I was born on the fourteenth, my marriage was on the fourteenth—and my name day falls on the fourteenth! Explain that!"

Many times, Beljambe had dreamed the exact number of travelers he'd have at his inn the next day. And Petit recounted the story of Cazotte's prophecy.

The priest then made this reflection: "Why not see in all this, quite simply…"

"Demons, is that it?" said Vaucorbeil.

The clergyman, instead of answering, nodded his head.

Marescot spoke of the oracle of Delphi. "No doubt about it, the miasma…"

"Ah, now it's miasma!"

"Personally, I believe in fluid," answered Bouvard.

"Neuro-sidereal fluid," added Pécuchet.

"Prove it! Show me this fluid! Besides which, fluids are outdated, trust me." Vaucorbeil moved away to stand in the shade. The other men followed him. "If you say to a child, 'I am a wolf and I'm going to eat you,' he'll imagine you really are a wolf and he'll be afraid. It's a dream suggested by your words. It's the same with a somnambulist: he'll accept whatever fantasy you tell him. He remembers but doesn't imagine, believes he's thinking for himself but is only reacting to sensations. You could suggest unspeakable crimes, and otherwise virtuous individuals might suddenly see themselves as wild animals and become cannibals."

Everyone looked at Bouvard and Pécuchet. Their science posed a threat to society.

Marescot's clerk reappeared in the garden, waving a letter from Mme. Vaucorbeil. The doctor unsealed it, blanched, and finally read these words: "I'm sewing ribbons onto a straw hat."

Stupefaction kept them from laughing.

"It's a coincidence, for God's sake! It doesn't prove a thing." And as the two hypnotists had triumphant looks on their faces, he turned back at the gate to add: "Stop what you're doing, I tell you! You're playing with fire!"

The priest dragged away his verger, scolding him harshly: "Are you out of your mind? Without my permission! Operations forbidden by the Church!"

Everyone had just left. Bouvard and Pécuchet were chatting with the teacher on the

monticule when Marcel came rushing from the orchard, his facial wrap undone, babbling, “Healed! Healed! Good sirs!”

“Fine, fine! That’s wonderful. Leave us alone!”

“Ah, good sirs! I love you! I am your servant!”

Petit, a believer in progress, had found the doctor’s explanations pedestrian and bourgeois. Science was a monopoly held by the rich. It excluded the people. It was high time that the old analysis of the Middle Ages be replaced by a spontaneous, broad-ranging synthesis! Truth must be captured with the heart—and declaring himself a spiritualist, he suggested several books, which weren’t perfect but pointed toward a new dawn.

They ordered copies.

Spiritualism poses as dogma the inevitable betterment of our species. The earth will one day become a paradise, and it was for this reason that the doctrine charmed the schoolteacher. Without mirroring Catholicism, it claims affinities with Saint Augustine and Saint Louis. Allan-Kardec even published fragments dictated by them, which could have been spoken by a man of today. It is practical, beneficial, and, like the telescope, it reveals superior worlds.

Spirits are transported there after death, in a state of ecstasy. But sometimes they descend to our planet, where they make furniture creak, partake in our entertainments, enjoy the beauties of nature and the pleasures of art.

Some of us, however, possess an aromal proboscis, a kind of long hose behind the skull that rises from the scalp up toward the planetary spheres and allows us to converse with the Saturnine spirits. Just because something is imperceptible doesn’t make it any less real: from the earth to the stars, from the stars to the earth, there is a continual back-and-forth, a transmission and exchange.

Reading this, Pécuchet’s heart swelled with muddled aspirations—and when night had fallen, Bouvard found him at his window contemplating those luminous spaces, which are populated with spirits.

Swedenborg had taken long journeys there. In less than a year he explored Venus, Mars, and Saturn, and made twenty-three visits to Jupiter alone. Moreover, he saw Jesus Christ in London, and he also saw St. Paul, St. John, and Moses. In 1736 he even witnessed the Last Judgment, which enabled him to provide a vivid description of Heaven.

It has flowers, palaces, markets, and churches, just as we do. Angels, who were once men, commit their thoughts to paper, converse upon household matters or spiritual concerns; and ecclesiastical tasks are performed by those who in earthly life cultivated the Holy Scriptures.

As for Hell, it is rife with a nauseating stench, and is littered with rundown shacks, heaps of filth, and shabbily dressed people.

And Pécuchet wracked his brain trying to understand what was so beautiful about these revelations. To Bouvard, they sounded like the ravings of an idiot. All this goes beyond the limits of nature! Still, who know what those limits are? And they gave themselves over to the following reflections:

One buffoon can delude the multitudes. A man with strong passions will rouse others. But how can will alone act on inert matter? They say that a Bavarian caused grapes to ripen; a man named Gervais revived a sunflower; in Toulouse, someone even caused the skies to clear.

Could there be an intermediary substance between the world and us? Perhaps the *od*, a new imponderable, a kind of electricity, was nothing other than this? Its emissions would explain the glow that hypnotized people claim to see, wandering lights in graveyards, ghostly shapes.

So then, were these images more than just an illusion? Could the extraordinary gifts of possessed individuals like somnambulists have a physical basis?

Whatever its origin, there exists an essence, a secret, universal agent. If we could possess it, we would no longer be at the mercy of time. What now requires centuries would take place in seconds; every miracle would be practicable and the universe would be at our command.

One result of the human mind's eternal covetousness was magic. Its powers have surely been overstated, but it is nonetheless genuine. Orientals who know it perform wonders; many travelers have said so. And at the Royal Palace, Mr. Dupotet made a magnetized needle follow his finger.

How does one become a magician? At first the idea struck them as demented. But it returned, persisted, tormented them, and they gave in to it, all the while pretending to laugh it off.

A preparatory regimen is indispensable.

To heighten their exaltation, they fasted and lived by night. They also rationed Germaine's food, wishing to turn her into a more receptive medium. She made up for it with drink, and downed so much brandy that she ended up becoming an alcoholic. Their pacing in the hallway kept her awake at night. She confused the sound of their footsteps with the buzzing in her ears and the imaginary voices she heard coming out of the walls. Having left a plaice in the cellar one morning, she took fright later that day on seeing the fish glowing with fire, felt worse afterward, and became convinced they'd put a spell on her.

Hoping to have visions, they squeezed each other's throats and brewed sachets of belladonna. Finally they adopted the magic box—a small box containing a mushroom knob studded with nails that is hung from a ribbon near the heart. All of it failed.

Still, there was always Dupotet's circle. Pécuchet traced a black ring on the ground with coal, "so as to shut in the animal spirits that must help the ambient spirits"—and,

pleased to have one up on Bouvard, he said in a pontifical tone, "I dare you to cross it!" Bouvard looked at the round area. His heart started beating faster, his eyes became cloudy. "Oh, enough of this!" And he leapt over the circle to put an end to his inexpressible malaise. Pécuchet, more excited than ever, wanted to make a ghost appear.

Under the Directory, a man on Rue de l'Echiquier had summoned forth victims of the Great Terror. Examples of specters were too numerous to count. What difference did it make if it was really an apparition or not! The main thing was to conjure something up.

The closer the deceased was to us, the better he answers our call. But Pécuchet had no family heirloom, no ring or cameo, no lock of hair; while Bouvard was in a position to bring back his father. And as he displayed some resistance to the idea, Pécuchet asked him what he was afraid of.

"Me? Why, nothing! Do whatever you like!"

They bribed Chamberlan, who secretly provided them with an old skull. A tailor cut them two black greatcoats, with hoods like monks' robes. The coach from Falaise delivered a long, wrapped cylinder. Then they set to the task, one curious to carry it out, the other afraid to believe in it.

The museum was redecorated as a catafalque. Three candlesticks burned at the edge of the table, which had been pushed against the wall, beneath the portrait of Bouvard Senior hanging over the death's head. They had even put a candle inside the skull; beams of light projected out of the two eye sockets.

In the middle of the room, incense was burning on a footrest. Bouvard stood to the rear—and Pécuchet, facing away from him, tossed fistfuls of sulfur into the hearth.

Before summoning the dead, one must obtain the demons' consent. It being a Friday—a day attributed to Bechet—they first had to deal with him. Bouvard, having bowed right and left, flexed his chin, raised his arms, and intoned: "By Ethaniel, Amazin, Ischyros…" He had forgotten the rest. Pécuchet quickly whispered the prompts, jotted on a piece of cardboard.

"…Ischyros, Athanatos, Adonai, Sadai, Eloy, Messias"—the litany was long—"I conjure you, I obsecrate you, I command you, O Bechet." Then, lowering his voice: "Where are you, Bechet? Bechet? Bechet!"

Bouvard collapsed into a chair, secretly content not to see Bechet: instinct warned him against this attempt, which he feared might be sacrilegious. Where was the soul of his father? Could it hear him? What if it were suddenly to appear?

The curtains moved slowly in the wind entering through a broken pane; the tapers flickered shadows on the skull and the painted portrait. Both looked the same earthy brown. Mold devoured the portrait's cheeks; its eyes had lost their luminosity. But the flame shone toward the ceiling, from the holes of the empty cranium. At times the latter seemed to replace the portrait's face, sit on the collar of his frock coat, wear his

whiskers—and the canvas, half unhinged, rocked and twitched.

Gradually they felt something like a breath brushing against them, the approach of an impalpable presence. Droplets of sweat pearled on Pécuchet's forehead. Bouvard's teeth began chattering. He felt a cramp in the pit of his stomach, the floor dropped beneath his heels like an ocean wave, the sulfur burning in the fireplace gave off huge wreaths of smoke, bats flitted about, a cry arose—what was that?

And beneath their hoods, their faces looked so horrified that their terror doubled. They didn't dare make a move or utter a sound, when from behind the door they heard moaning, like a soul in torment.

Finally, they decided to chance it.

It was their old housekeeper, who had been spying through a crack in the door and thought she'd seen the devil himself; kneeling in the hallway, she crossed herself over and over.

All attempts at reasoning were futile. She left them that very evening, no longer willing to serve such individuals.

Germaine talked. Chamberlan lost his job—and formed a silent coalition against them, abetted by Abbé Jeufroy, Mme. Bordin, and Foureau. Their way of living, which was different from everyone else, was not to people's liking. They became suspect, and even inspired a vague fear.

What especially ruined them in public opinion was their choice of domestic. For lack of anyone else, they had taken on Marcel. His harelip, his ugliness, and his gibberish kept people away. An abandoned child, he had grown up on his own in the fields, and retained from his long destitution an insatiable hunger. Animals that had died from disease, rotten lard, a run-over dog—anything was all right with him, so long as the piece was big enough. He was gentle as a lamb, but completely stupid.

Marcel's gratitude had led him to offer his services to Messrs. Bouvard and Pécuchet. Aside from which, believing them to be sorcerers, he hoped he might derive some supernatural benefits.

On one of his first days, he confided a secret. Once, on the heath around Poligny, a man had found a gold ingot. The story has been related in town histories of Falaise. They didn't know the rest: twelve brothers, before setting off on a long journey, had hidden twelve identical ingots along the road from Chavignolles to Bretteville; and Marcel begged his masters to begin looking for them. Those ingots, they said to themselves, had perhaps been buried at the time of the emigration.

This was an opportunity to use the divining rod! Its powers are suspect. They looked into the matter all the same—and learned that a certain Pierre Garnier offered scientific reasons to support it: wellsprings and metal emit corpuscles that are in sympathy with wood.

That hardly seemed likely—still, who knows? Let's try! They cut themselves a

hazelwood fork, and one morning set out in search of the treasure.

"We'll have to give it back," said Bouvard.

"Ah, no! What an idea!"

After three hours of walking, a thought stopped them in their tracks: "When he said the road from Chavignolles to Bretteville, did he mean the old road or the new one? It must be the old one."

They retraced their steps and covered the area in every direction; the remnants of the old road were not easy to find.

Marcel ran left and right, like a spaniel on the hunt; every five minutes, Bouvard had to call him back. Pécuchet advanced with measured steps, holding the rod by its two branches, point tipped upward. Often it seemed to him that a force, like a tendril, was pulling it toward the ground—and Marcel quickly made a gash in the nearest tree to mark the spot for later.

Just then Pécuchet slowed down. His mouth hung open, his eyes rolled back. Bouvard called his name and shook him by the shoulders. He didn't react, but remained motionless like La Barbée. Then he said he'd felt a kind of tearing around his heart, a very peculiar sensation, no doubt coming from the divining rod—and he refused to touch it anymore.

They next day they returned to the marks made in the trees. Marcel dug holes with a spade. Their excavations yielded nothing, and each time they were sorely disappointed. Pécuchet sat at the edge of a ditch; and as he was daydreaming with his head raised, straining to hear the voice of the spirits with his aromal proboscis, wondering whether he even had one, he fixed his gaze on the visor of his cap. The ecstasy from the day before overcame him again. It lasted a long time, became frightening.

Above the oats, on a path, they saw a felt hat. It was Dr. Vaucorbeil riding his mare. Bouvard and Marcel called him over.

The fit was just subsiding when the doctor reached them. He removed Pécuchet's cap, the better to examine him—and, discovering his forehead covered in coppery scabs: "Aha! *Fructus belli*! Those are syphilitic blotches, my friend. You need treatment, for goodness' sake! One mustn't trifle with love."

Mortified, Pécuchet jammed his cap back on. It was a beret-like thing with a puffy top and semi-circular visor, the model of which he had found in Amoros's manual.

The doctor's words stupefied him. He pondered them, his eyes raised heavenward —and was suddenly seized anew. Vaucorbeil watched him; then with a flick of his finger he knocked off the cap. Pécuchet regained his wits.

"I thought as much," said the doctor. "The glossy visor is hypnotizing you like a mirror. This phenomenon is not uncommon in persons who stare too closely at a shiny object."

He told them how to perform the experiment on hens, climbed back onto his

mount, and slowly rode off.

A mile and a half farther on, they spotted a pyramid-shaped object standing on the horizon in a farmyard. It looked like a monstrous bunch of black grapes, dotted here and there with red. It was a long pole fitted with crosspieces, following Norman custom, on which turkeys perched, puffing out their throats in the sun.

"Let's go in!" And Pécuchet approached the farmer, who granted their request.

They drew a line down the middle of the cider house floor with whiting, bound a turkey by its feet, then lay it on its belly, the center of its back set along the white mark. The animal closed its eyes and soon appeared dead. It was the same for the others. Bouvard quickly passed each one to Pécuchet, who set it down while it was still dazed. The farmhands became audibly concerned. The farmer's wife gave a shriek. A little girl began to cry.

Bouvard untied all the birds. They gradually came back to life. But they still needed to find out what the eventual consequences would be. At a rather harsh objection from Pécuchet, the farmer snatched up his pitchfork: "Get the hell out of here, or so help me God your guts will hang from the end of this!"

They beat a retreat.

No matter! The problem was solved: ecstasy depends on material causes.

In which case, what is matter? What is spirit? What causes the influence of one over the other, and vice versa?

To determine this, they studied Voltaire, Bossuet, Fénelon—and they even renewed their membership in the library.

The ancient masters were inaccessible, given the length of their works and the difficulty of their language. But Jouffroy and Damiron initiated them into modern philosophy; and they had volumes that touched on the philosophy of the last century.

Bouvard drew his arguments from La Mettrie, Locke, and Helvetius; Pécuchet from Cousin, Thomas Reid, and Gérando. The first became a devotee of experience, while for the second the ideal was everything. There was some Aristotle in the latter, some Plato in the former—and they argued.

"The soul is immaterial!" said one.

"Hardly!" said the other. "Madness, chloroform, and bleeding can affect it, and since it doesn't always think, it is not a substance whose only function is to think."

"Nonetheless," objected Pécuchet, "I have, within myself, something that transcends my body and sometimes contradicts it."

"A being within the being? *Homo duplex*! Come off it! Different tendencies reveal conflicting motives, no more no less."

"But this something, this soul, remains identical regardless of external changes. Therefore, it is simple, indivisible, and hence spiritual!"

"If the soul were simple," retorted Bouvard, "a newborn would remember and

reason like an adult! Thought, on the contrary, follows the development of the brain. As for being indivisible, the scent of a rose or the appetite of a wolf cannot be divided in two any more than you can subdivide the will or an affirmation."

"That makes no difference whatsoever!" said Pécuchet. "The soul is exempt from material properties!"

"Do you accept the existence of weight?" Bouvard responded. "Now, if matter can fall, by the same token it can think. Having had a beginning, our soul must have an end; and since it is dependent on our organs, it will disappear with them."

"I, for one, consider it immortal! God cannot wish…"

"And what if God doesn't exist?"

"What!" And Pécuchet reeled off the three Cartesian proofs: "*Primo*, God is contained in the idea we have of Him; *secundo*, His existence is possible; *tertio*, as a finite being, how can I conceive of the infinite? But since we *can* conceive of it, the idea must come to us from God. Ergo, God exists!"

He moved on to the evidence of consciousness, to popular tradition, to the need for a creator. "When I see a clock…"

"Yes, yes, I know! But where is the clockmaker's father?"

"Still, there needs to be a cause!"

Bouvard had doubts about causes: "When one phenomenon follows another, we conclude that the second derives from the first. Prove it!"

"But the layout of the universe denotes an intention, some sort of plan!"

"Why? Evil is just as well organized as good. The worm that grows in the sheep's brain and causes its death has an anatomy just as complex as the sheep itself. Abnormalities are more common than normal functions. The human body could have been designed better. Three-quarters of the planet is sterile. The moon lights our path, but isn't always visible! Do you believe that the oceans were meant for ships to sail on, or that wood was created to heat our homes?"

Pécuchet replied, "And yet, the stomach was made for digestion, the legs for walking, and the eyes for seeing, even though people can suffer from dyspepsia, fractures, and cataracts. There is no design without a purpose! The reasons will become clear eventually. Everything follows certain laws. Thus, there are ultimate causes."

Bouvard thought that Spinoza might provide him with arguments, and he wrote to Dumouchel to send the French edition. Dumouchel mailed him a copy that had belonged to his friend Professor Varlot, who had gone into exile after the coup of December 2, 1851.

The *Ethics* intimidated them with its axioms and corollaries. They read only the passages already underlined in pencil, from which they gathered the following:

Substance is what exists of itself and by itself, without cause or origin. This substance is God. He alone is extension—and extension has no limits. How could it?

But although it is infinite, it is not absolute infinity. For it contains only one kind of perfection, whereas the absolute contains all of them.

They paused frequently to ponder what they'd read. Pécuchet absorbed pinches of snuff and Bouvard was flushed with concentration.

"Are you enjoying this?"

"Oh, certainly! Read on!"

God branches out into countless attributes, each of which expresses in its own way the infinity of His being. We can know only two of these: extension and thought. From thought and extension flow countless modes, each of which contains other modes. The being that could simultaneously encompass all extension and all thought would see this not as contingency or accident, but rather as a geometric series of terms, each related to the other by immutable laws.

"Ah, wouldn't that be lovely!" said Pécuchet.

As such, there is no freedom for either man or God.

"Do you hear that!" cried Bouvard.

If God had a will, a goal, if He acted toward a purpose, that would mean that He needed something, which means He would be lacking in perfection. He would not be God.

Our world is therefore but a point in the totality of things—and our universe, which the intelligence cannot penetrate, only one universe in an infinity of neighboring universes with infinite modifications. Extension envelops our universe, but is enveloped by God, who contains in His thought all possible universes, and His thought is itself contained in His substance.

They felt as if they were in a balloon, at night, in the glacial cold, carried along in an endless rush toward a bottomless abyss—with nothing around them but the ungraspable, the immobile, the eternal. It was too much. They gave up.

And, desiring something less taxing, they bought Mr. Guesnier's *Basic Course in Philosophy*, for classroom use.

The author asks which method would be best, the ontological or the psychological? The first was suitable for societies in their infancy, when man focused his attention on the external world. But now that he focuses it back onto himself, "we believe the latter to be more scientific." And Bouvard and Pécuchet thought so, too.

The aim of psychology is to study facts that occur "deep within oneself." One discovers these facts through observation.

"Let us observe!" And for a full two weeks, usually after lunch, they peered haphazardly into their consciousness, hoping to make great discoveries, and ending up making none, which astounded them greatly.

One phenomenon occupies the *self*, in other words the idea. What is its nature? It has been suggested that objects were placed in the brain, and that the brain transmitted

their images to our mind, which makes us aware of them.

But if ideas are spiritual, how can they represent matter? This is the root of skepticism regarding external perceptions. If ideas are material, does that mean spiritual objects are not represented? This is the root of skepticism vis-à-vis internal notions. "Moreover, let the reader beware! This hypothesis would lead to atheism!" For an image, being finite, could not picture the infinite.

"Still," objected Bouvard, "when I think of a forest, a person, or a dog, I see that forest, person, or dog. Therefore ideas can picture them."

And they broached the origin of ideas.

According to Locke, there are two kinds: sensation and reflection. Condillac, for his part, reduces it all to sensation.

But in that case, reflection would have no basis. It needs a subject, a sentient being. And it is powerless to provide us with the great fundamental truths: God, worthiness and unworthiness, rightness, beauty, and so on—notions that we call *innate*, in other words universal and anterior to experience.

"If they were universal, we would have them the moment we were born."

"He means we are *disposed* to having them, and Descartes…"

"Your Descartes can't keep his ideas straight! In one place he maintains that the fetus has these notions, and in another he admits that they're only implicit."

Pécuchet was stunned: "Where did you find that?"

"In Gérando!" And Bouvard gave him a tap on the stomach.

"Stop that!" said Pécuchet. Then, starting on Condillac: "Our thoughts are not just metamorphoses of sensation! Sensation brings them about, gets them started. To get them started, it needs a motor. Matter in itself cannot produce movement—and I found *that* in your Voltaire!" he added with a deep bow.

And thus they harped over the same arguments, each one denigrating the other's opinion without managing to convince him of his own.

But philosophy heightened their opinion of themselves. They looked back pityingly on their former preoccupations with farming, literature, and politics. The museum now inspired their disgust. They would have liked nothing better than to sell off all those knickknacks. And they moved on to chapter 2, on the faculties of the soul.

They are three in number, no more, no less: feeling, knowing, and wanting.

The faculty of feeling can be divided into physical sensibility and moral sensibility.

Physical sensations are naturally split into five types, each one dependent on a sensory organ.

The workings of moral sensibility, on the other hand, owe nothing to the body. "What could the pleasure Archimedes felt upon discovering the laws of weight possibly have in common with the crude enjoyment of Apicius devouring a boar's head!"

This moral sensibility is broken up into four categories; and the second category,

"moral desires," is itself divided into five types, while the phenomena of the fourth category, "affections," are subdivided into two other types, including love of self—"a legitimate penchant, no doubt, but one that, if taken to extremes, is known as egotism."

The faculty of knowing contains rational apperception, in which we find two principal movements and four degrees. Abstraction can offer pitfalls to unstable minds. Memory lets one correspond with the past, as foresight does with the future. Imagination is a particular faculty all its own, *sui generis*.

This huge effort to demonstrate a load of platitudes, the author's pedantic tone, his monotonous turns of phrase ("We are prepared to admit…" "Far be it from us to think…" "Let us examine our own conscience…"), the excessive praise for Dugald Stewart, and his overweening verbiage left them so revolted that, skipping over the faculty of wanting, they jumped straight to logic.

It taught them the meaning of analysis, synthesis, induction, and deduction, as well as the primary causes of our errors. Nearly all of them resulted from the misuse of language.

"The sun sets, the sky clouds over, winter is approaching": insidious locutions that make us believe in personal entities, when they are only simple events! "I remember such-and-such an object, axiom, or truth." An illusion! Ideas, not things, are what remain in the self, and a truly rigorous language would have us say: "I remember such-and-such an act of my mind by which I perceived this object, deduced this axiom, or recognized this truth."

As the term that designates an incident cannot encompass all of its modes, they labored to use only abstract words. And instead of saying, "Let's take a stroll," "It's dinner time," or "I've got diarrhea," they came out with: "A walk would be beneficial," "The hour has arrived in which to absorb foodstuffs," and "I am experiencing a need for evacuation."

Once they had mastered the tools of logic, they reviewed its various criteria, beginning with common sense.

If a single individual can know nothing, why should every individual taken together know any more? An error, even one a hundred thousand years old, does not become true simply by virtue of longevity. The mob invariably follows the beaten path. On the contrary, progress is made by the few.

Is it better to trust in what the senses tell us? They can sometimes be deceptive, and convey only appearances. The heart of the matter escapes them.

Reason offers more guarantees, being immutable and impersonal. But to manifest itself, it has to be incarnated. Thus, reason becomes *my* reason. A rule matters little if it is false. We can't even prove that this one is true.

Reason should therefore be monitored by the senses. But this can lead to deeper shadows. A confused sensation will induce a defective law, which will then impede a

clear view of things.

There is still morality. But this means bringing God down to the level of usefulness, as if our needs were the measure of the absolute!

As for sensory evidence, refuted by some, affirmed by others, it is its own criterion. Mr. Cousin demonstrated this.

"I don't see anything left but Revelation," said Bouvard. "But to believe in that, you have to admit two prior strands of knowledge, that of the body experiencing, and that of the mind perceiving—in other words, feeling and reason, which are human impressions, and therefore suspect."

Pécuchet reflected, folding his arms. "But that will lead us into the terrifying abyss of skepticism."

According to Bouvard, it terrified only second-rate minds.

"Thanks a lot!" retorted Pécuchet. "Still, certain facts are indisputable. One can attain the truth, within limits."

"What limits? Do two and two always make four? Are the contents always somehow less than the container? What does it mean to say an approximate truth, a fraction of God, part of an indivisible thing?"

"Ah, you're nothing but a sophist!" And Pécuchet sulked for three days.

They used the time to pore over the indexes of several tomes. Bouvard smiled from time to time—and, relaunching the conversation:

"It's just that it's difficult not to doubt! Take the existence of God: the proofs by Descartes, Kant, and Leibniz are not the same, and even contradict each other. The creation of the world by atoms, or by a mind, remains inconceivable.

"I feel as if I'm both matter and thought, not knowing which is which. Impenetrability, solidity, and weight all seem as mysterious to me as my soul—and even more so, the union of soul to body.

"To explain it, Leibniz imagined his harmony, Malebranche his 'pre-motion,' Cudworth a mediator, and Bonnet a continual miracle—which is asinine, because a continual miracle would no longer be a miracle."

"True!" said Pécuchet.

And the two of them admitted that they were getting awfully tired of philosophy. So many systems only confuse matters. Metaphysics serves no purpose. One could live without it.

Moreover, their financial straits were worsening. They owed Beljambe for three casks of wine, Langlois for twenty-five pounds of sugar, 120 francs to the tailor, sixty to the cobbler. Their expenses continued to mount, and Farmer Gouy still wasn't paying his rent.

They went to see Marescot to find out how they might get some money, either by selling off Les Ecalles, or by mortgaging their farm, or by relinquishing title to their

house, which could be paid off by a life annuity while they continued to live in it—an impractical solution, said Marescot, but a better deal might be in the offing. He would keep them apprised.

After that, they thought about their poor garden. Bouvard undertook to clear the arbor and Pécuchet to trim the espalier. Marcel's job was to till the flowerbeds.

After a quarter of an hour, they stopped. One closed his pruning knife, the other put down his shears, and slowly they began walking—Bouvard in the shade of the linden trees, without a vest, chest forward, arms bare; Pécuchet along the wall, head lowered, hands clasped behind his back, the visor of his cap turned to the nape of his neck for protection. And thus they walked in parallel lines without even seeing Marcel, who sat resting at the edge of the shack, chomping on a hunk of bread.

Thoughts had surfaced during their meditations. They walked toward each other, afraid of forgetting them—and the metaphysics resumed.

It resumed apropos of rain or shine, a pebble in their shoe, a flower on the lawn—anything and everything. Watching a candle burn, they wondered if light resides in the object or in the eye. Since stars might well have disappeared by the time their glimmer reaches us, perhaps we are admiring things that don't exist.

Finding an old Raspail cigarette in a vest pocket, they crumbled it over water and the camphor reacted. So there was movement in matter! A higher degree of movement would engender life.

But if all it took to create living creatures was matter in motion, these creatures would not be so varied. For initially there existed neither land nor water nor men nor plants. What, then, is primordial matter, which no one has seen and which is nothing like the objects of this world, but which has produced them all?

Sometimes they needed a particular book. Dumouchel, tired of doing them favors, stopped answering altogether, and they pursued the question on their own, especially Pécuchet. His need for truth became an insatiable thirst. Swayed by Bouvard's speeches, he abandoned spiritualism, took it up again only to abandon it anew, and cried out with his head in his hands, "Oh! This doubt! This doubt! I'd rather have nothingness!"

Bouvard perceived the flaws inherent in materialism but tried to hold onto it, declaring that it was driving him off his nut.

They tried to find solid bases for reasoning. The bases collapsed—and suddenly there was no more idea, the way a fly skitters off the moment you try to catch it.

On winter evenings, they conversed in the museum, by the fire, staring at the embers. The wind blowing in the passageway made the panes rattle, the black masses of the trees waved from side to side, and the sadness of night deepened the gravity of their thoughts.

Now and again, Bouvard paced to the other end of the room, then back again. The candlesticks and bowls near the walls threw oblique shadows onto the floor; and the

silhouette of St. Peter's nose, seen in profile, stretched across the ceiling like a giant hunting horn.

It was difficult to move amid all the objects, and Bouvard, in his distraction, frequently bumped into the statue. With its bulging eyes, drooping lip, and drunkard's face, it also bothered Pécuchet. For some time they had wanted to get rid of it, but out of negligence they put it off from one day to the next.

One evening, in the middle of an argument about monads, Bouvard stubbed his toe on St. Peter's foot—and, turning his irritation against him: "I've had it up to here with this clown! He's going out!"

Lugging it down the stairs was too much work. They opened the window and set it against the sill. Pécuchet, on his knees, struggled to lift the heels, while Bouvard pushed with all his weight on the shoulders. The stone man refused to budge. They had to use the halberd as a lever—and finally managed to lay it horizontal. Then, tipping over, it dropped into the void, tiara first. A dull thud was heard below, and the next day they found it in the old compost pit, broken in twelve pieces.

An hour later the notary entered, bearing good tidings. Someone from the area would advance a thousand *écus* in return for the mortgage on their farm. And as they were congratulating each other: "Pardon me for interrupting, but there is one further condition. The party also wishes to buy Les Ecalles for fifteen hundred francs. The loan can be paid out today—I've got the cash in my office."

They were both inclined to let the land go. Bouvard finally answered, "Oh, what the hell… Agreed!"

"Done!" said Marescot. And he told them the person's name, which was Mme. Bordin.

"I suspected as much!" cried Pécuchet.

Bouvard, feeling humiliated, kept silent.

She or someone else—what difference did it make? The main thing was to resolve their predicament.

Once the money was in hand (the amount for Les Ecalles would come later), they immediately paid off their debts, and were returning home when Farmer Gouy accosted them in the market square.

He was just heading over to see them to deliver some bad news. The night before, the wind had knocked down twenty apple trees in the courtyard, demolished the distillery, and torn the roof off the barn. They spent the rest of the afternoon assessing the damage, and spent the following day with the carpenter, the mason, and the roofer. The repairs would run at least eighteen hundred francs.

Then, that evening, Gouy showed up again. Marianne herself had just told him about the sale of Les Ecalles. A plot with such magnificent yield, the perfect place for him, which needed almost no cultivation, the best plot on the whole farm!—and he

asked for a rent reduction.

The two gentlemen refused. They brought the matter before the justice of the peace, who found for the farmer. The loss of Les Ecalles, valued at two thousand francs per acre, reduced his yearly income by seventy francs—and in court, he would certainly win.

Their nest egg was sorely diminished. What could they do? How would they survive, at this rate?

They both sat at the table, thoroughly discouraged. Marcel had no idea how to cook; this evening's dinner was even worse than usual. The soup was like dishwater, the rabbit smelled bad, the beans were undercooked, the dishes greasy, and at dessert Bouvard exploded, threatening to smash them all over his head.

"Let's be philosophical," said Pécuchet. "A little less money, one woman's scheming, a domestic's ineptitude—what difference does any of that make? You are too absorbed in matter!"

"But when it actually causes me hardship…" said Bouvard.

"Personally, I do not accept its existence!" answered Pécuchet.

He had just lately read an analysis by Berkeley, and added: "I deny extension, time, space, even substance! For true substance is the mind perceiving qualities."

"Wonderful," said Bouvard. "But if you eliminate the world, you remove all proofs of God's existence."

Pécuchet gave a loud, long protest, despite a head cold he'd gotten from taking potassium iodide—and a persistent fever added to his exaltation. Bouvard, growing worried, sent for the doctor.

Vaucorbeil prescribed orange syrup with iodide, and cinnabar baths for afterward.

"What's the use?" said Pécuchet. "Sooner or later, my earthly form will disappear. Essence never perishes!"

"No doubt," said the doctor, "matter is indestructible. Nevertheless…"

"No, no, no! What's indestructible is *being.* This body here before me—yours, doctor—prevents me from knowing your true self. It is only a kind of garment, or rather a mask!"

Vaucorbeil thought he was deranged. "Good night, then. And take better care of your mask!"

Pécuchet did not stop there. He bought an introduction to Hegelian philosophy, then tried to explain it to Bouvard: "Whatever is rational is real. Only the idea is real. The laws of the mind are the laws of the universe. Man's reason is identical to God's."

Bouvard pretended to understand.

"Thus, the absolute is at once subject and object, the unity in which all differences are joined together. In this way, contradictions are resolved. Shadow makes light possible, cold mixed with heat produces temperature, the organism is maintained only

through its own destruction. Everywhere there is a principle that divides and a principle that binds."

They were sitting on the monticule. The priest came walking by the latticework fence, holding his breviary. Pécuchet invited him in, to finish the presentation of Hegel in his presence and see what he made of it.

The man of the cloth sat with them, and Pécuchet broached the topic of Christianity.

"No other religion has so well established this truth: 'Nature is but a moment of the Idea!'"

"A moment of the idea?" murmured the priest, taken aback.

"Of course! God, by taking a visible envelope, demonstrated His consubstantial union with it."

"With nature? Now really!"

"By His decease, He bore witness to the essence of death. Thus, death was in Him; it was and is part of God."

The clergyman bridled: "No blasphemies, please! It was for the salvation of the human race that He endured the sufferings…"

"Error! You are thinking of death in the individual sense, which is no doubt an evil. But relative to things, it's different. Do not separate spirit from matter!"

"Nonetheless, sir, before the Creation…"

"There was no Creation. This has always existed. Otherwise you would have a new being adding itself to divine thought, which is absurd."

The priest stood up. He had business to attend to elsewhere.

"I think I got him that time!" said Pécuchet. "One more thing! Since the existence of the world is but a continual passage from life to death and from death to life, then rather than everything *being*, nothing *is.* But everything *becomes.* You understand?"

"Of course I understand! Well, actually, I don't." In the final account, idealism exasperated Bouvard. "I've had quite enough of this! The famous *cogito* gives me a pain. They take the notions of things for the things themselves. They explain ideas that can hardly be understood using words that can't be understood at all! Substance, extension, energy, matter, soul—what a load of abstractions and speculations. As for God, it's impossible to know what He is, or even *if* He is! It used to be that He caused the wind to blow, lightning to strike, the world to turn. Today He's reduced to almost nothing. Besides, I don't see what good He serves."

"And where does moral philosophy fit into all that?"

"Oh, who cares?"

"It *does* lack a foundation," Pécuchet said to himself.

And he fell silent, backed into an impasse, a consequence of the premises that he himself had posited. It was a shock, a crushing blow.

Bouvard no longer even believed in matter.

The certainty that nothing exists (deplorable as it may be) is nonetheless a certainty. Few people have even that much. This transcendence filled them with pride; they wanted to show it off. An opportunity arose.

One morning, while out buying tobacco, they saw a gathering in front of Langlois's door. People were crowding around the coach from Falaise, and all the talk was of Touache, a convict known to be at large in the area. The driver had seen him in Croix-Verte escorted by two policemen, and the good people of Chavignolles breathed a collective sigh of relief.

Girbal and the captain remained in the square. Then came the justice of the peace, curious for news, and Mr. Marescot in velvet toque and sheepskin slippers.

Langlois invited them to honor his shop with their presence: they would be more comfortable there. And despite the customers and the frequent tinkling of the doorbell, the gentlemen continued to discuss Touache's misdeeds.

"Good lord," said Bouvard, "he had poor instincts, that's all!"

"Instincts can be triumphed over by virtue," replied the notary.

"What if you don't have any virtue?" And Bouvard flatly denied the concept of free will.

"All the same," said the captain, "I'm free to do whatever I want! I'm free, for instance…to wiggle my leg."

"No, sir! You have a motive for wiggling your leg!"

The captain searched for an answer and couldn't find one. But Girbal got off this shot: "A republican arguing against freedom—now that's funny!"

"I'll say!" said Langlois.

Bouvard questioned him: "How come you don't give your money to the poor?"

The grocer threw a worried glance around his shop. "Hey, I'm no fool—I'm keeping it for me!"

"If you were St. Vincent de Paul, you would act differently, because you would have his personality. Instead, you obey yours. Therefore, you are not free!"

"That's quibbling," the men answered in unison.

Without missing a beat, Bouvard pointed to the scale on the counter: "That scale will remain motionless so long as one of the pans is empty. It's the same for will. The scale balancing two seemingly equal weights is like the mind when it deliberates between motivations, until such time as the stronger one wins out and becomes determinant."

"None of this," said Girbal, "has anything to do with Touache, or with his being a vicious little bastard."

Pécuchet spoke up: "Vices are natural occurrences, like floods or storms."

The notary cut him off; and rising with each word onto the tips of his toes: "I find

your system to be utterly immoral. It gives free rein to every excess, excuses crimes, and exonerates the guilty!"

"Precisely," said Bouvard. "The poor wretch who follows his appetites is perfectly within his rights, just like the honest man who listens to reason."

"Don't you start defending monsters!"

"Why is he a monster? When a blind person is born, or an idiot, or a killer, we say it's not in the natural order of things, as if we knew what that order was, or as if nature were pursuing some preset goal!"

"So you would deny Providence?"

"I most certainly would!"

"Just look at history!" cried Pécuchet. "See how many kings have been assassinated, peoples massacred, families torn apart, and individuals ruined."

"And meanwhile," added Bouvard (for they were goading each other on), "this same Providence cares for little birds and makes the legs of crayfish grow back. If by Providence you mean a law that governs everything, then I'll gladly accept it, and then some!"

"Nonetheless, sir," said the notary, "there are principles!"

"What are you talking about! According to Condillac, the better a science, the less it needs them! Principles do no more than gather up accepted ideas and send us back to the very notions that are the most debatable."

"Have you," continued Pécuchet, "scrutinized, explored the mysteries of metaphysics, as we have?"

"It's true, gentlemen, it's true!"

And the group dispersed.

But Coulon, taking them aside, said to them in an avuncular tone that he certainly wasn't a religious man and he even hated Jesuits. Still, he wouldn't go as far as they did! Oh, no, for a fact! And at the corner of the town square, they happened by the captain, who relit his pipe and grumbled, "I still say I can do whatever the hell I please!"

Bouvard and Pécuchet expounded their horrifying views on other occasions as well. They cast doubt on the integrity of men, the chastity of women, the wisdom of the government, the common sense of the people—in short, they undermined the foundations of society.

Foureau became indignant and threatened them with jail time if they continued talking like that.

Their superiority was painfully obvious and wounded people's feelings. As they promoted immoral theses, they must themselves be immoral. Slanderous things were said.

Then their minds developed a piteous faculty, that of perceiving stupidity and being unable to tolerate it. Insignificant things saddened them: newspaper advertisements, a

burgher's profile, an inane comment overheard by chance. And reflecting on what was said in their village, and on the fact that one could find other Coulons, other Marescots, other Foureaus stretching to the ends of the earth, they felt upon their shoulders the weight of the entire world.

They no longer went out, received no visitors.

One afternoon, they heard an argument in the courtyard between Marcel and a man wearing a wide-brimmed hat and dark glasses. It was the academic Larsonneur. He did not fail to notice a curtain being parted, a door being shut. His visit was an attempt at reconciliation and he went away furious, instructing the domestic to tell his masters that he took them for a couple of boors.

Bouvard and Pécuchet cared not a whit. The world diminished in importance. They saw it as if through a haze that had drifted down from their brains and over their eyes.

Besides, isn't everything merely an illusion, a bad dream? Perhaps, all things considered, prosperity and misfortune balanced each other out. But the common good provides no comfort to the individual. "What do I care about other people!" said Pécuchet.

His despair aggrieved Bouvard: it was he who had pushed his friend to this point. And the disrepair of their house nourished their chagrin with daily irritations.

To lift their spirits, they tried to accept their situation, prescribed themselves chores, and soon fell back into an even deeper listlessness, a profound discouragement.

After their meals, they sat with their elbows on the table, moaning lugubriously. Marcel stared; then he went back into his kitchen to stuff himself in solitude.

That summer, they received a wedding announcement for the marriage of Dumouchel to the widow Olympe-Zulma Poulet. Good for him! And they remembered the time when they were happy. Why didn't they follow the harvesters anymore? What happened to the days when they walked into farms, looking everywhere for antiques? Nothing now could procure such sweet moments as the ones brought about by the distillery or their literary studies. A gulf stood between them and such times. Something irrevocable had occurred.

They decided to take a walk in the fields as in the old days, strayed too far, got lost. Small puffy clouds rolled across the sky, the breeze swayed the bellflowers on the oats, a stream burbled alongside a field—when suddenly a revolting odor stopped them in their tracks. And between some thistles they saw the carcass of a dog lying on a patch of gravel.

Its four legs were dried out. The grimace of its muzzle revealed yellowed fangs in bluish gums. In place of its belly was a dun-colored mass, which seemed to palpitate from all the vermin swarming over it. They bustled about under the hot sun, in the buzzing of flies and that fierce, intolerable, all-consuming stench.

Bouvard's forehead wrinkled and tears ran down his cheeks. Pécuchet said stoically,

“Someday that will be us!”

The idea of death had taken hold of them. They talked about it as they headed back home.

After all, it doesn’t exist. You simply float off into the dew, the breeze, the stars. You become part of the tree sap, the sparkle of fine gemstones, birds’ plumage. You give back to nature what she has lent you. The void yawning before us is no more terrifying than the void stretching behind us.

They tried to imagine it as an intense night, a bottomless pit, an endless faint. Anything was better than this monotonous, absurd, hopeless existence.

They recapitulated their unrequited desires. Bouvard had always wanted horses, carriages, fine Burgundy wines, and beautiful, compliant maidens in a splendid abode. Pécuchet’s ambition was philosophical knowledge. And the greatest problem of all, the one that encompassed all others, could be resolved in a single moment. When would it come?

“We might as well end it all right now.”

“As you like,” said Bouvard.

And they examined the question of suicide.

Where is the harm in throwing off an oppressive burden? In committing an act that doesn’t hurt anyone? If it offended God, would we even have such an ability? It’s not an act of cowardice, no matter what people say—and what delicious insolence to scoff, even to their own detriment, at what men value most highly!

They deliberated about the manner of death. Poison can be painful. Cutting your throat takes too much courage. Asphyxiation often fails. Finally, Pécuchet set up two gymnastics cables in the attic; then, having tied them to the same crossbeam, he made a slipknot and pushed two chairs beneath them, with which to reach the ropes.

This method was adopted.

They wondered what impression this would leave in the town, who would get their library, their papers, their collection. The thought of death made them feel very sorry for themselves. Still, they did not abandon their plan; and the more they talked about it, the more they grew accustomed to the idea.

On the evening of December 24, from ten to twelve, they meditated in the museum, each dressed in his own way. Bouvard was wearing a smock over his knit vest; Pécuchet, for the last three months, had worn nothing but the monk’s robe, out of thriftiness.

As they were starving (for Marcel had gone out at dawn and not returned), Bouvard thought it hygienic to down a carafe of brandy, and Pécuchet to have some tea.

Lifting the kettle, he spilled water on the wood floor.

“Clumsy oaf!” shouted Bouvard.

Then, finding the brew too weak, he tried to strengthen it by adding two more spoonfuls.

"It's going to be atrocious," said Pécuchet.

"Nonsense!"

And as both of them tried to grab hold of the box, the tray fell and one of the cups broke, the last of the good china set.

Bouvard turned white. "Keep it up! Wreck everything! Don't let me stand in your way!"

"Oh, big loss!"

"It *is* a big loss! Those were from my father!"

"Natural father," Pécuchet corrected with a snicker.

"Oh, so now you're insulting me!"

"No, but I'm boring you! Admit it!"

And Pécuchet was seized by rage, or rather temporary insanity, and so was Bouvard. They both yelled at the same time, one irritated by hunger, the other by liquor. Pécuchet's throat emitted no more than a continuous rattle:

"I can't stand this life anymore! I'd rather be dead. Farewell!"

He took the candlestick, turned on his heels, and slammed the door. Bouvard, in the dark, had difficulty finding it. He ran after him, burst into the attic.

The candle was on the floor, and Pécuchet stood on one of the chairs with the rope in his hand.

The spirit of imitation overcame Bouvard: "Wait for me!" And he was climbing onto the second chair when he suddenly stopped. "But…we haven't drawn up our wills."

"Mercy—you're right!"

Sobs welled up in their chests. They huddled around the attic window to breathe.

The air was cold, and vast numbers of stars shone in the sky, which was jet black. The whiteness of the snow covering the earth faded into the mists on the horizon.

They saw small lights at ground level. Growing larger, moving together, they all converged on the church.

Curiosity drove them toward it.

It was Midnight Mass. The lights came from the shepherds' lanterns. Several of them were shaking out their coats under the porch awning.

The serpent droned; the incense burned. Glasses, suspended lengthwise along the nave, gave off three hues of a multicolored fire—and at the end of the perspective, on both sides of the tabernacle, giant candles sent up their red flames. Above the heads of the congregation and the wide-brimmed hats of the women, past the cantors, one could see the priest in his gold chasuble. His shrill voice was answered by the strong baritones of the men filling the rood, and the wooden vault trembled on its stone arches. Images representing the Stations of the Cross decorated the walls. In the middle of the chancel, in front of the altar, a lamb was lying down, its hooves folded under its chest, its ears standing straight.

The warm temperature filled them with a peculiar sensation of well-being. And their thoughts, so stormy only a short while before, became gentle like receding waves.

They listened to the Gospel and the Credo, watched the priest's movements. Meanwhile, the old, the young, the poor women in tatters, the farmer's wives in tall bonnets, the strapping lads with blond fluff on their cheeks, all of them prayed, absorbed in the same profound joy—and on the straw floor of the stable they saw, shining like a sun, the body of the Godchild. The faith of these people touched Bouvard in spite of his reason, and Pécuchet despite the hardness of his heart.

There was a silence. All the backs bent low, and at the tingling of a bell the little lamb bleated.

The priest displayed the host at the end of his arms, as high as he could reach. Then out burst a song of rejoicing, which summoned everyone to the feet of the King of Angels. Bouvard and Pécuchet joined them without thinking, and felt something like daybreak rising in their souls.

Nine

MARCEL RETURNED THE NEXT DAY at three o'clock, bleary-eyed and green in the face, his pants ripped, a lump on his forehead, reeking of drink, and generally in a revolting state.

Following his yearly custom, he had been about twenty miles away, near Iqueuville, to ring in Christmas Eve with a friend; and stuttering worse than ever, weeping, pelting himself with his fists, he begged forgiveness as if he had committed a crime. His masters pardoned him: a singular calm inclined them toward indulgence.

The snow had melted quickly and they walked around their garden, breathing in the tepid air, happy to be alive.

Was it mere chance that had turned them away from death? Bouvard felt moved to pity. Pécuchet recalled his First Communion. And full of gratitude for the Force, the Cause that had given them back their will to live, they resolved to read the Holy Scriptures.

The Gospel broadened their souls, dazzled them like a sun. They saw Jesus standing on the mount, one arm raised, the crowd below listening raptly; or else at the edge of the lake, among the apostles hauling their nets; then on the ass's back in a clamor of alleluias, his hair rustling in the breeze from the trembling palms; and finally on the cross, head bent, from which tears fell on the world for all eternity. What seduced and delighted them was the concern for the meek of the earth, the defense of the wretched, the exaltation of the oppressed. And there was nothing theological in this book, though it opened wide the heavens. Amid so many precepts, there was not a single dogma, no requirement but purity of heart.

Nor did the miracles surprise them, for they had known of these since childhood. The loftiness of Saint John delighted Pécuchet, and helped him to understand the *Imitation of Christ*.

This latter book contained no parables, flowers, or birds, but instead was filled with the laments of a soul contracted onto itself. It saddened Bouvard to read these pages, which seemed to have been composed under overcast skies, in the depths of a cloister, between a steeple and a tomb. Our mortal life is painted in such deplorable colors that our only choice is to abandon it and turn to God instead—and the two friends, after their many disappointments, felt a need for simplicity, for the love of something, for peace of mind.

They tackled Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Jeremiah.

But the Bible terrified them with its lion-voiced prophets, the roar of thunder in the skies, all the sobbing of Gehenna, and God dispersing empires as if they were clouds in the wind. They read it on Sundays, at the hour of vespers, while the church bell tolled.

One day they went to Mass, then went back again. It provided a distraction at the end of the week. The Count and Countess de Faverges nodded at them from a distance, which did not go unnoticed. The justice of the peace winked at them and said, "Excellent! I approve!" All the neighborhood ladies began sending them consecrated bread.

Abbé Jeufroy paid them a visit. They paid one back, then began visiting each other regularly. The priest avoided talking about religion. They were amazed by his restraint —so much so that Pécuchet, feigning indifference, asked him how one goes about obtaining faith.

"First of all, practice."

They started practicing, one out of hope, the other as a dare—for Bouvard was already convinced he would never be devout. For an entire month he regularly followed the services but, unlike Pécuchet, he did not give up meat on Fridays.

Was this fast for hygienic reasons? What good has hygiene ever done! A matter of propriety? He couldn't care less! A token of submission to the church? To hell with that! In short, he declared the rule absurd, Pharisaical, and contrary to the spirit of the Gospels.

In the past on Good Friday, they had eaten whatever Germaine served them. But this time, Bouvard ordered a steak. He sat at the table, cut the meat—and Marcel watched him, aghast, while Pécuchet grimly skinned his halibut.

Bouvard sat, fork in one hand, knife in the other. Finally making up his mind, he raised a mouthful to his lips. Suddenly his hands began trembling, his wide face grew pale, and his head fell back.

"Are you feeling ill?"

"No! But…" And he admitted that his education was stronger than he was, and he couldn't bring himself to eat meat that day for fear he would die.

Pécuchet, without gloating over his victory, took the opportunity to live as he saw fit.

One evening he came home, his face suffused with a serious joy, and announced that he'd just been to confession. Then they talked about the importance of penitence.

Bouvard endorsed the confession of the earliest Christians, who did it in public. The modern way was too easy. Still, he had to admit that this inquiry into oneself was a step in the right direction, a kernel of morality.

Pécuchet, striving for perfection, reviewed his own vices. His pride had vanished long ago. His enjoyment of work protected him from sloth. As for gluttony, no one was more temperate. He was sometimes prey to anger, and so he vowed to stop feeling any.

After that, one had to acquire the virtues, first and foremost humility—in other words, to believe oneself incapable of any merit, unworthy of the slightest recompense; to immolate one's spirit and place oneself so low that one is trampled underfoot like road dirt. He was still a long way from attaining such a state of mind.

Another virtue he lacked was chastity. Deep down, he missed Mélie, and the pastel of the lady in the Louis XV dress with its low neckline troubled him. He shut it in the closet, pushed modesty to the point of being afraid to gaze upon his own person, and went to bed in his long johns.

So many precautions against lust only made it keener. Especially in the morning he had to struggle mightily with himself—as had Saint Paul, Saint Benedict, and Saint Jerome, at a well advanced age. After which, they resorted to fervent penance. Pain is a form of expiation, a remedy, and a means: an homage to Jesus Christ. Any love requires sacrifice, and what could be more painful than to sacrifice one's body!

To mortify himself, Pécuchet gave up his little glass of liqueur after meals, cut down to four pinches of snuff a day, and stopped wearing his hat in the bitter cold.

One day, Bouvard, who was reattaching the vines, set a ladder against the railing of the balcony next to the house, and inadvertently found himself staring down into his friend's room. Naked to the waist, Pécuchet was striking his shoulders with the clothes whisk, gently at first, then more energetically. Then he ripped off his shorts, whipped his buttocks, and collapsed into a chair, out of breath.

Bouvard was disturbed, as if discovering a mystery that was not meant to be witnessed.

For a while, he had been noticing that the windowpanes were cleaner, the napkins had fewer holes, the meals were better—changes due to the intervention of Reine, the priest's housekeeper.

Making little distinction between church and kitchen matters, strong as a plowboy, and a loyal soul beneath her impertinent exterior, she insinuated herself into the household, gave advice, became lord and mistress. Pécuchet trusted her implicitly.

One time she brought along a portly individual, who had small eyes like a Chinaman and a nose like a vulture's beak. This was Mr. Goutman, a dealer in religious artifacts. Out by the shed, he took a few items from their boxes: crosses, medallions, and rosaries in all sizes, candelabras for shrines, portable altars, tinsel bouquets, as well as Sacred Hearts made of blue cardboard, Saint Josephs with reddish beards, and porcelain crucifixes. Pécuchet coveted them all; only the price held him back.

Goutman did not want money. He preferred to swap, and up in the museum he offered a stock of his merchandise against the old ironware and all the lead.

To Bouvard this merchandise looked hideous. But Pécuchet's pleading eyes, Reine's insistance, and the trader's glibness finally won him over. Seeing how malleable he was, Goutman asked for the halberd as well; Bouvard, tired of demonstrating its use, let it go.

The bottom line was that these gentlemen owed a balance of one hundred francs. They came to an arrangement, four payments over three months—and congratulated themselves on an excellent trade.

They distributed their acquisitions throughout the house. A straw-filled manger and a cork cathedral decorated the museum. On Pécuchet's mantel was a wax Saint John the Baptist, along the corridor portraits of the great bishops, and at the foot of the staircase, beneath a chain chandelier, a Holy Virgin in an azure cloak and a halo of stars. Marcel kept these splendors well dusted, convinced that nothing more beautiful could be found in paradise itself.

What a shame the Saint Peter had been broken, and how well it would have fit in the vestibule! Pécuchet sometimes paused by the former compost pit, in which one could make out a tiara, a sandal, a bit of ear; he let out a sigh, then continued with his gardening. For now he combined manual labor with religious exercises, and he dug the earth, dressed in the monk's robe and comparing himself to Saint Bruno. The outfit might have been sacrilegious; he stopped wearing it.

But he took on an ecclesiastical air, no doubt from his visits to the priest. He had the same wan smile and voice; and looking perpetually chilly, like the priest, he pulled his two hands into his sleeves. The day came when even the cock's crow annoyed him; the roses bothered him; he stopped going out, or cast fierce glances at the countryside.

Bouvard let himself be taken to the Month of Mary festival. The children singing hymns, the bunches of lilacs, the festoons of greenery gave him a feeling of imperishable youth. God appeared to his heart in the form of birds' nests, the clarity of spring water, the glories of sunlight—and his friend's devotion struck him as fussy and excessive.

"Why do you moan when you eat?"

"We *must* moan while eating," answered Pécuchet, "for it was by this path that mankind lost its innocence"—a sentence he had read in the *Seminarian's Manual*, two duodecimo volumes borrowed from Abbé Jeufroy. And he drank water from La Salette, indulged behind closed doors in jaculatory orations, and aspired to enter the Brotherhood of Saint Francis.

To obtain the boon of perseverance, he decided to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Virgin. There were too many to choose from. Should he go to Our Lady of Fourvières? Chartres? Embrun? Marseilles? Auray? The one in La Délivrande, which was much closer, would fit the bill. "You come with me!"

"I'll look like a nincompoop," said Bouvard. Then again, he might return from it a believer, which was fine by him, and he let himself be persuaded.

Pilgrimages should be taken on foot. But twenty-six miles was a long way to walk; and as public transportation was ill-suited to meditation they rented an old cabriolet, which after a twelve-hour ride deposited them at the inn.

Their room had two beds and two chests of drawers, supporting two water jugs in small oval basins, and the innkeeper informed them that this was the "capuchin room." During the Great Terror, they had hidden Our Lady of La Délivrande in it, so carefully that the good Fathers said Mass there in secret.

Pécuchet was glad to hear this, and he read aloud a notice about the chapel that he found downstairs in the kitchen. It was founded at the beginning of the second century by Saint Regnobert, the first bishop of Lisieux; or else by Saint Ragnebert, who lived in the seventh century; or perhaps by Robert the Magnificent in the middle of the eleventh.

The Danish, the Normans, and especially the Protestants had ravaged and set fire to it at various times. Around 1112, the primitive statue was discovered by a sheep, which indicated its location by stamping its hoof on the grass. On that spot, Count Baudoin built a sanctuary.

Her miracles were beyond counting. When a merchant from Bayeux captured by the Saracens prayed to her, his chains fell away and he escaped. A miser discovered a swarm of rats in his barn, appealed to her for help, and the rats fled. The contact with a medallion that had brushed against her effigy caused the deathbed conversion of an old materialist from Versailles. She restored speech to a certain Mr. Adeline, who had lost it after having blasphemed. And with her protection, Mr. and Mme. de Becqueville had had the strength to live chastely throughout their marriage.

Among those she cured of irremediable afflictions were Mlle. de Palfresne, Anne Lorieux, Marie Duchemin, François Dufai, and Mme. de Jumillac, *née* d'Osseville.

Some very prominent figures had visited her: Louis XI, Louis XII, two daughters of Gaston d'Orléans, Cardinal Wiseman, Samirrhi, the Patriarch of Antioch, Monsignor Véroles, the Apostolic Vicar of Manchuria—and the Archbishop of Quélen, come to give thanks for the conversion of Prince Talleyrand.

"She might," said Pécuchet, "even convert you!"

Bouvard, already in bed, let out a grunt and fell sound asleep.

The next morning at six, they entered the chapel.

Another was being built. Drop cloths and planks obscured the nave and the rococo-style monument was not to Bouvard's taste, especially the red marble altar with its Corinthian pilasters.

The miraculous statue, in a niche to the left of the choir, was draped in a sequined robe. The verger appeared with a taper for each of them. He placed these in a kind of herse that topped the balustrade, asked for three francs, bowed, and left.

Then they looked at the ex-votos. Inscriptions on plaques bore witness to the gratitude of the faithful. One could admire two crossed swords given by a former student at the Polytechnic, wedding bouquets, military medals, silver hearts, and, in a corner of the ground floor, a thicket of crutches.

From the sacristy a priest emerged, bearing the holy ciborium. After stopping for a

few minutes at the foot of the altar, he climbed the three steps and said the Oremus, the Introitus, and the Kyrie, which the kneeling altar boy repeated back in one breath.

There were no more than a dozen or so old women in the pews. You could hear the rustling of their prayer books and the banging of a hammer against stone. Pécuchet, bent over his prie-dieu, answered the amens. During the Elevation, he begged Our Lady to send him a faith that was constant and indestructible.

Bouvard, in a chair next to Pécuchet, took his prayer book from him and paused at the Litanies to the Virgin.

"Most pure, most chaste, venerable, kind, powerful, merciful, ivory tower, house of gold, gate of morning": these words of adoration, these hyperboles carried him toward she who had received so many homages. He dreamed of her the way she is depicted in church paintings, on a mass of clouds, cherubim at her feet, the Holy Infant at her breast —mother of tenderness, solicited by all the afflictions of the world, the female ideal transposed into the heavens. For, having emerged from her womb, man exalts her love and aspires only to rest on her bosom.

When the Mass was over, they walked by the stalls lining the wall nearest the square. On display were images, baptismal fonts, urns with gold filigree, Jesus Christs made from coconuts, ivory rosary beads—and the sun, striking the glass in the picture frames, dazzled their eyes, accentuating the crudeness of the paintings and the hideousness of the drawings. Bouvard, who at home found these things abominable, here felt more indulgent. He bought a miniature Virgin in blue paste. Pécuchet contented himself with a small rosary as a souvenir.

The merchants cried out to them, "Come on! Come over this way! Five francs, three francs, sixty centimes, two *sols*! Don't turn your back on Our Lady!"

The two pilgrims strolled by without choosing anything. Unflattering remarks were heard in their wake:

"What are those oddballs doing here?"

"I'll bet they're Turks!"

"Or even Protestants!"

A tall girl tugged on Pécuchet's coat. An old man in glasses put a hand on his shoulder. Everyone clamored at once. Then, leaving their stalls, they surrounded them, increased their solicitations and insults.

Bouvard had had enough: "Leave us alone, for God's sake!" The mob dispersed. But a fat woman followed them halfway across the square, shouting that they'd be sorry.

Heading back to the inn, they chanced upon Goutman in the café. His business had brought him to these parts, and he was chatting with an individual who examined invoices on the table between them.

This individual had a leather cap, wide floppy pants, a ruddy complexion, and a narrow waist, despite his white hair. He looked at once like a retired officer and an old

ham actor.

Now and then he let out a curse, then at a word from Goutman said it again in a lower voice, quickly calmed down, and moved on to the next sheet.

After watching him for about fifteen minutes, Bouvard approached their table. "Barberou, I believe?"

"Bouvard!" said the man in the cap, and they hugged each other warmly.

In the past twenty years, Barberou had suffered all sorts of misfortunes, working as the managing editor of a newspaper, an insurance salesman, the supervisor of an oyster bed—"Remind me to tell you about that!" Having returned to his first line of work, he now traveled for a firm in Bordeaux, and Goutman, who "covered the diocese," helped him place wines with the clergy. "Give me just a minute, and I'm all yours!"

He went back to his calculations, then suddenly jerked up on his bench: "What are you talking about, two thousand!"

"If that's what it says."

"Oh, that's a good one!"

"However do you mean?"

"I mean I saw Hérambert myself," Barberou retorted, livid. "The bill is for four thousand, no joke!"

The salesman did not bat an eyelash. "Well, then it clears your debt. So?"

Barberou bolted upright, and from his face, first white, then purple, Bouvard and Pécuchet thought he was going to strangle Goutman. Then he sat back down and crossed his arms. "You're a real son of a bitch, you know that?"

"No insults please, Mr. Barberou. There are witnesses—control yourself!"

"I'll see you in court!"

"Tut tut!" And having buckled his portfolio, Goutman tipped the brim of his hat: "A pleasure!" And he left.

Barberou laid out the facts: against a credit of one thousand francs, doubled as a result of usurious maneuvers, he had delivered to Goutman three thousand francs' worth of wine, which would pay off his debt with a thousand in profit. But now, on the contrary, he owed three thousand. His bosses would give him the sack, he'd be brought up on charges! "That bastard! That crook! That lousy Jew! And he has the nerve to dine in presbyteries! Besides, the minute the clergy gets involved…!" He fulminated against the priests, and banged on the table so violently that the statuette almost fell off.

"Easy!" said Bouvard.

"So what's that?" said Barberou; and having unwrapped the little Virgin: "A pilgrimage souvenir! Yours?"

Instead of answering, Bouvard gave him an ambiguous smile.

"It's mine," said Pécuchet.

"You break my heart," answered Barberou. "But I'll clue you in about all this—

never fear!" And since one has to be philosophical about things and moping doesn't get you anywhere, he invited them to lunch. The three of them took a table.

Barberou seemed to be in good spirits, talked about the old days, put his arm around the serving girl's waist, tried to tease Bouvard about his paunch. He'd come visit them soon and bring a book they might find amusing.

The prospect of his visit appealed to them only moderately. They talked about it on the cab ride home, for an hour, to the sound of the horse's hoof-beats. Then Pécuchet closed his eyes and Bouvard fell silent. Deep down, he was leaning toward religion.

Mr. Marescot had shown up at the house the day before to pass along some urgent information. That was all Marcel knew.

The notary could not see them for three days, at which point he laid out the matter. For a rent of seventy-five hundred francs, Mme. Bordin was offering to buy the farm from Mr. Bouvard.

She had had her eye on it since she was a girl, and knew all its ins and outs, its ups and downs—and her desire for it was like a cancer that slowly ate away at her. For the woman, good Normande that she was, cherished property above all, less for the security of capital than for the joy of walking on soil that belongs to you. In hopes of owning this particular soil, she had made investigations, maintained daily surveillance, saved up for a long time, and now she impatiently awaited Bouvard's reply.

He was embarrassed, not wanting to leave Pécuchet in the lurch. But they had to seize the opportunity—which had come about because of the pilgrimage, he was sure of it. For a second time, Providence was smiling upon them.

They proposed the following conditions: the rent—six thousand francs, not seventy-five hundred—would be passed down to the last survivor. Marescot stressed the fact that one was in chronically poor health and the other of apoplectic temperament, and Mme. Bordin signed the contract, carried away by passion.

Bouvard came away feeling melancholy. Someone now desired his death; and this reflection inspired serious thoughts about God and eternity.

Three days later, Abbé Jeufroy invited them to a ceremonial luncheon that he gave once a year for his colleagues.

The meal began at two in the afternoon and lasted until eleven that night. They drank pear brandy and told jokes. Abbé Pruneau improvised an acrostic, Mr. Bougon did some card tricks, and Cerpet, a young vicar, sang a romantic ballad that flirted with the risqué. Bouvard enjoyed the gathering, and the following day he was in a less somber frame of mind.

The priest came to see him often. He painted religion in gracious colors. Besides, what was the risk? And soon Bouvard agreed to approach the blessed table. Pécuchet, at the same time as he, would join in the sacrament.

The great day arrived.

Because of all the first communicants, the church was crowded. The bourgeois and their wives squeezed onto the benches, and the common folk stood in back, or in the rood above the door.

What was about to happen was inexplicable, Bouvard mused. But reason cannot help one understand certain things. Some very great men had admitted this; he might as well do as they had. And in a kind of daze, he contemplated the altar, the censer, the candles; his head was light from having fasted, and he experienced an odd feeling of weakness.

Pécuchet, meditating on the passion of Jesus Christ, worked himself into a surge of love. He wanted to offer up his soul, the souls of others—along with the delights, the transports, the illuminations of the saints, every creature, the entire universe. Although he was praying fervently, the various parts of the Mass seemed to drag on a bit.

Finally, the little boys knelt on the first step of the altar, forming a black band with their robes, unevenly topped by blond or brown heads of hair. The little girls replaced them, their veils falling from their crowns; from a distance, it looked like a line of white clouds at the back of the choir. Then it was the adults' turn.

The first one at the altar was Pécuchet. But, no doubt under the sway of his emotion, he kept rocking his head from side to side. The priest had some difficulty placing the host in his mouth, and Pécuchet finally received it with his eyes turning in their sockets.

Bouvard, on the other hand, opened his jaws so wide that his tongue flopped over his lower lip like a banner. Standing up, he elbowed Mme. Bordin. Their eyes met, and she smiled. Without knowing why, he blushed.

After Mme. Bordin, Mlle. de Faverges took communion, together with the countess, their female companion, and a gentleman who was unknown in Chavignolles.

The last to go up were Placquevent and Petit the schoolmaster—when suddenly they saw Gorgu appear. He had shaved his goatee and he took his seat, arms crossed over his chest most edifyingly.

The priest lectured the little boys. Let them take care later in life not to be like Judas, who betrayed his God, and to keep forever their robe of innocence. Pécuchet was sorry not to have kept his. But then chairs started scuffling: the mothers were in a hurry to kiss their children.

At the exit, the parishioners exchanged greetings. Some had tears in their eyes. Mme. de Faverges, waiting for her coach, turned toward Bouvard and Pécuchet and introduced them to her future son-in-law: "Baron de Mahurot, engineer." The count had complained of not seeing them anymore. He would be back the following week: "Please make a note of it!" The carriage pulled up, the ladies of the castle departed, and the crowd dispersed.

In their yard, they found a package lying in the grass; as the gate was locked, the

mailman had simply tossed it over the wall. It was the book Barberou had promised: *Christianity Examined* by Louis Hervieu, a former student at the Ecole Normale. Pécuchet pushed it away. Bouvard had no interest in reading it.

People had told him repeatedly that the sacrament would transform him. For several days, he waited for something to flower in his consciousness. But he was still the same, and a painful astonishment gripped him. How was this possible! The flesh of God mingles with our flesh, and nothing happens! The mind that governs all does not illuminate our spirit. The Supreme Entity is abandoning us to our own impotence.

Mr. Jeufroy, to reassure him, sent him a copy of Abbé Gaume's *Catechism of Perseverance*.

Pécuchet's devotion, on the other hand, had only increased. He would have liked to commune with wine as well as bread, he intoned psalms while walking in the hallway, and even stopped the residents of Chavignolles to debate and convert them. Vaucorbeil laughed in his face, Girbal shrugged his shoulders, and the captain called him Tartuffe. People now felt that he was taking this too far.

It is a useful practice to envision things as so many symbols. If you hear a clap of thunder, think of the Last Judgment. Before a cloudless sky, imagine the dwelling of the blessed. Tell yourself while walking that each step brings you closer to your final reward. Pécuchet observed this method. When putting on his clothes, he thought of the carnal envelope donned by the second person of the Trinity. The ticking of the clock reminded him of his beating heart; a pinprick, the nails on the cross. But even though he remained on his knees for hours, multiplied his fasts, and strained his imagination, he could not attain detachment from himself. It was impossible to reach perfect contemplation!

He tried reading the mystical authors: Saint Teresa, Saint John of the Cross, Luis of Granada, Scupoli, and more modern ones like Monsignor Chaillot. Instead of the sublime thoughts he expected, he found only platitudes, a lax writing style, cold imagery, and forced comparisons worthy of a tombstone engraver.

He nonetheless learned that there is an active and a passive purgation, inner and outer vision, four kinds of oratory, nine excellences in love, six degrees of humility, and that offenses to the soul are tantamount to spiritual theft.

Certain points troubled him. If the flesh is cursed, why should we thank God for the bounties of earthly existence? Where is the boundary between the fear that is necessary for salvation and the hope that is no less so? Where can we find signs of grace? And so on.

Mr. Jeufroy's answers were simplistic: "Don't torment yourself! Trying to delve too deeply into these things leads you down a slippery slope."

Gaume's *Catechism* had so disgusted Bouvard that he began reading Louis Hervieu's book. It was a summary of modern critiques that had been banned by the government;

Barberou, as a republican, had snapped up a copy.

The volume planted doubts in Bouvard's soul, first and foremost about Original Sin. "If God gave man the potential for sin, he shouldn't punish him for it. And evil predates the Fall, since there were already volcanoes and wild beasts! Besides, the dogma runs counter to notions of justice."

"What can you do?" said the priest. "That's one of those truths that everyone agrees on, but no one can prove—and we ourselves tax our children with the sins of their fathers. And so customs and laws justify the decree of Providence, which we find again in nature."

Bouvard nodded his head. He also had doubts about Hell: "Any punishment should aim at the rehabilitation of the guilty party—which becomes impossible if condemnation is eternal. And how many suffer it! Just think: all the ancients, the Jews, the Muslims, the idolaters, the heretics, and children who die before being baptized—children that God created! And for what? To punish them for faults they didn't even commit!"

"Such is Saint Augustine's opinion," added the priest. "And Saint Fulgentius includes even the fetus in damnation. The Church, to tell the truth, hasn't made a determination in that regard. One remark, however: it is not God but the sinner who damns himself. And since offenses are infinite, because God is infinite, then punishment must be infinite. Is that all?"

"Explain the Trinity to me!" said Bouvard.

"Gladly. Let's make a comparison: the three sides of a triangle. Or rather, our soul, which contains being, knowledge, and will. What in man we call faculties are persons in God. That is the mystery."

"But the three sides of a triangle are not each a triangle. Those three faculties of the soul don't make three souls. So your persons of the Trinity would be three Gods."

"That's blasphemy!"

"So then there's only one person, one God, a substance modified in three ways."

"Let us worship without seeking to understand," said the priest.

"Very well," said Bouvard. He was afraid of seeming irreligious, and of losing favor at the chateau.

For now they went there three times a week, at around five o'clock in winter, to be warmed by a cup of tea. The count's dashing figure "recalled the glamour of the old court" the countess, placid and plump, showed great discernment in all things; Mlle. Yolande, their daughter, was "the ideal of a young girl," an angel straight out of a keepsake; and Mme. de Noaris, their companion, had a drooping nose that made her look like Pécuchet.

The first time they entered the salon, she was defending someone: "Take my word for it, he's changed! His gift proves it."

The someone in question was Gorgu. He had given the future bride and groom a Gothic prie-dieu, which they were just bringing in. The two families' crests of arms were featured in relief and in color. Mr. de Mahurot seemed pleased with it, and Mme. de Noaris said to him, "You'll keep my protégé in mind, won't you!"

Then she brought in two children, a boy of about twelve and his sister, who might have been ten. The holes in their ragged clothes showed glimpses of their limbs, which were chapped from cold. One had a pair of old slippers on his feet, the other just a single wooden shoe. Their foreheads disappeared beneath their hair, and they looked around them with the shining eyes of frightened young wolves.

Mme. de Noaris recounted that she had come upon them that very morning on the main road. Placquevent could give no details.

They were asked their names. "Victor. Victorine." Where was their father? "In jail." And before that, what did he do? "Nothing." Where did they come from? "Saint Pierre." Which Saint Pierre? In reply, the two youngsters could only repeat with a sniffle, "Dunno, dunno." Their mother was dead, and they begged in the streets.

Mme. de Noaris explained how dangerous it would be simply to abandon them. She moved the countess, piqued the count's sense of honor, won the daughter's support, insisted, and finally prevailed. The gamekeeper's wife would take care of them. An occupation could be found for them later on. And as they knew neither how to read nor write, Mme. de Noaris herself would prepare them for catechism.

When Abbé Jeufroy came to the chateau, they would send for the two youngsters. He would ask them a series of questions, then give a small lecture, showing off a bit for his audience.

One time he expatiated on the patriarchs. Bouvard, walking home afterward with him and Pécuchet, criticized them harshly. Jacob's distinguishing trait was fraud, David's was murder, and Solomon's was debauchery.

The cleric answered that one had to look beyond that. Abraham's sacrifice was a representation of the Passion; Jacob was another avatar of the Messiah, like Joseph, the bronze serpent, or Moses.

"Do you believe," said Bouvard, "that he wrote the Pentateuch?"

"Yes, no question about it!"

"And yet it tells of his own death! The same goes for Joshua—and as for Judges, the author specifies that at the time he wrote the story, Israel did not yet have kings. Therefore the work was written when there were *already* kings. And I'm surprised by the prophets, too."

"Oh, so now you're doubting the prophets!"

"Not at all! But their overheated minds perceived Jehovah in various forms, as a fire, a bush, an old man, a dove; and they were not sure of the Revelation because they always asked for a sign."

"Ah! And you came across these subtle observations…?"

"In Spinoza!" The name made the priest jump. "Have you read him?"

"God forbid!"

"And yet, father, science…"

"Sir, one is not a scientist if one is a Christian." Science inspired his sarcasm: "Will your science cause one grain of wheat to grow? What can we really know?" he asked.

But *he* knew that the world was created for us; he knew that archangels are above angels; he knew that the human body will be reborn as it was at about age thirty.

His sacerdotal aplomb annoyed Bouvard, who out of distrust of Louis Hervieu wrote to Varlot. And Pécuchet, better informed, asked Mr. Jeufroy for explanations of the Scriptures.

The six days of Genesis meant six long epochs. The Jews' theft of the precious vases from the Egyptians must be understood as intellectual riches, the arts, the secret of which they had stolen. Isaiah did not disrobe completely: *nudus* in Latin meant naked to the waist. Thus Virgil recommends getting nude for physical labor, and that author would never have espoused so immodest a precept! Ezekiel devouring a book is hardly extraordinary: don't we say that someone "devours" a brochure, or a newspaper?

But if we can see metaphors everywhere, what becomes of facts? The priest nonetheless maintained that they were real.

This way of understanding things struck Pécuchet as disloyal. He took his research further and brought with him a note on the contradictions in the Bible.

Exodus teaches that for forty years they made sacrifices in the desert; but according to Amos and Jeremiah, they made none. The Chronicles and Ezra do not agree on the exact number of the population. In Deuteronomy, Moses sees the Lord face-to-face, while according to Exodus, this could never be. So where does Divine Inspiration fit into all this?

"All the more reason to believe in it," Mr. Jeufroy answered with a smile. "Impostors need concordance, but the true believer pays it no heed. In case of doubt, let us fall back on the Church, which is always infallible."

But who granted it this infallibility?

The councils of Basel and Constance attribute it to the councils. But the councils often differ: witness what happened to Athanasius and Arius. The councils of Florence and Lateran confer it on the pope; but Adrian VI asserts that the pope can be as mistaken as anyone else.

Mere pettifoggery! All this has no bearing on the permanence of the dogma.

Louis Hervieu's book lists the divergences: Once, baptism was for adults only. Extreme unction became a sacrament only in the ninth century. Real Presence was decreed in the eighth, Purgatory recognized in the fifteenth, and the Immaculate Conception dates from practically yesterday.

And Pécuchet got to the point of not knowing what to think of Jesus. Three of the Gospels call him a man. In a passage from John, he seems to be the equal of God, but in another passage by the same author he recognizes himself as God's inferior.

Abbé Jeufroy countered with the Epistles of Abgar, the *Acts of Pilate*, and the testimony of the sibyls, "which is basically true." He found the Virgin among the Gauls, the annunciation of a redeemer in China, the Trinity everywhere, the cross on the bonnet of the Grand Lama and in Egypt on the fist of the gods—and he even showed an engraving depicting a Nilometer, which according to Pécuchet was a phallus.

The priest secretly consulted his friend Pruneau, who sought out proofs for him in the authoritative works. A battle of erudition began; and spurred on by pride, Pécuchet became transcendent, a mythologist.

He compared the Virgin to Isis, the Eucharist to the Persian Homa, Bacchus to Moses, and Noah's ark to the vessel of Xisuthros. To him, these resemblances proved that all religions were the same.

But there could not be several religions, since there was only one God—and whenever he ran out of arguments, the man of the cloth would cry, "It's a mystery!"

What did this word mean? A lack of knowledge—fine. But if it designated something that implied a contradiction simply by being spoken, then it was just nonsense. After that, Pécuchet would not leave Mr. Jeufroy alone. He showed up unannounced in his garden, waited for him in the confessional, took up their debate in the sacristy. The priest began thinking of ploys to avoid him.

Once, when he had gone to Sassetot to administer last rites, Pécuchet ran ahead of him on the road so as to make their meeting inevitable. It was evening, toward the end of August. The scarlet sky was darkening; a fat cloud took shape, smooth at bottom with volutes at the top.

Pécuchet first spoke of humdrum matters. Then, having managed to slip in the word *martyr*: "How many do you suppose there were?"

"Oh, about twenty million, at least."

"Origen says the number isn't nearly that high."

"Ah, but you know, Origen is suspect!"

A huge gust of wind blew by, flattening the grass in the ditches and bending the two rows of elms as far as the horizon.

Pécuchet resumed: "They count among the martyrs a lot of Gallic bishops who were killed resisting the Barbarians, which is no longer an issue."

"Are you defending the emperors now?"

According to Pécuchet, they had been maligned. "This story of the Theban legion is a fable. I also dispute Symphorosa and her seven sons, Felicity and her seven daughters, the seven virgins of Ancyra, condemned to be raped even though in their seventies, and the eleven thousand virgins of Saint Ursula, one of whose companions was named

Undecimilla, a name mistaken for a number—and even more so the ten martyrs of Alexandria!"

"And yet…! And yet, they can be found in authors worthy of our credence."

Droplets of water began to fall. The priest opened his umbrella, and Pécuchet, once underneath, dared claim that the Catholics had created more martyrs among the Jews, Muslims, Protestants, and freethinkers than all the ancient Romans put together.

The clergyman took exception: "But we can count ten persecutions from Nero to Caius Galerius alone!"

"Yes, and what about the massacre of the Albigenses! And Saint Bartholomew! And the revocation of the Edict of Nantes!"

"Deplorable excesses, I grant you, but you can't compare those people to Saint Stephen, Saint Lawrence, Cyprian, Polycarp, scores of missionaries…"

"Excuse me! May I remind you of Hypatia, Jerome of Prague, John Huss, Bruno, Vanini, and Anne Dubourg!"

The rain increased, its spikes shooting down so hard that they bounced off the ground like little white projectiles.

Pécuchet and Mr. Jeufroy walked slowly, squeezed against each other, and the priest said, "After being tortured abominably, they were thrown into boiling cauldrons!"

"The Inquisition also used torture, and did just as good a job of burning you alive."

"They put illustrious noblewomen on display in brothels!"

"Do you think Louis XIV's dragoons were such decent fellows?"

"And remember, the Christians did nothing against the state!"

"Neither did the Huguenots!"

The wind blew fiercely, sweeping the rain through the air. The heavy drops pocked the leaves and streamed down the sides of the road. The putty-colored sky bled into the barren fields, harvest time having come and gone. There was not a rooftop to be seen, only a shepherd's hovel in the distance.

Pécuchet's thin raincoat no longer had a single dry thread. The cold water ran down his spine, poured into his boots, his ears, his eyes, despite the visor on his Amoros cap. The priest, carrying the train of his cassock over one arm, uncovered his legs, and the points of his tricorn hat spewed water onto his shoulders like cathedral gargoyles.

They had to stop, and turning their backs against the storm, they stood face-to-face, belly against belly, gripping the shuddering umbrella with all four hands.

Mr. Jeufroy had not interrupted his defense of Catholics: "Did they crucify your Protestants, as Saint Simon was, or throw a man to be devoured by two tigers, like Saint Ignatius?"

"But aren't you forgetting all the wives separated from their husbands, or children taken from their mothers! And the exile of the poor through the snows, at the edge of cliffs! They were thrown in jail in heaps. No sooner were they dead than they were

dragged through the mire."

The curate scoffed. "Forgive me if I don't believe a word of it! And *our* martyrs are less dubious. Saint Blandina was tossed in a net to a wild steer. Saint Julitta was beaten with sticks. Saint Tarachus, Saint Probus, and Saint Andronicus had their teeth smashed in with a hammer, their sides ripped open with iron combs, their hands pierced with red-hot spikes, and the skin torn off their skulls!"

"You're exaggerating," said Pécuchet. "Back then, the deaths of martyrs was a rhetorical figure."

"What do you mean, rhetorical?"

"Just that! Whereas I, sir, am citing history. The Catholics in Ireland disemboweled pregnant women and ripped the infants from their wombs!"

"Never!"

"And then fed them to the hogs!"

"Oh, please!"

"In Belgium, they buried them alive!"

"Sure they did!"

"We know their names!"

"And besides!" objected the priest, shaking his umbrella angrily. "You can't call them martyrs, since there aren't any outside the Church!"

"One more thing! If the value of martyrdom depends on the doctrine, how can that serve to demonstrate its excellence?"

The rain died down. They were silent the rest of the way back to the village; but at the presbytery door, the priest said, "I pity you! I really pity you!"

Pécuchet immediately told Bouvard about his altercation. It had filled him with antireligious spite—and an hour later, sitting before a kindling fire, he was reading *Father Meslier*. Its heavy-handed negations shocked him. Then, blaming himself for having perhaps misjudged true heroes, he looked through the *Universal Biography* to read the lives of the most glorious martyrs.

What a roar went up from the crowd as they entered the arena! And if the lions and jaguars weren't ferocious enough, the spectators excited them onward with their shouts and gestures. You could see the martyrs all covered in blood, standing with a smile on their lips and eyes turned heavenward—Saint Perpetua braided her hair so as not to show her suffering—and Pécuchet fell into a reverie. The window was open, the night was calm, and stars shone in the sky. Something must have transpired in their souls, something we can no longer comprehend—a joy, a divine spasm? And Pécuchet, musing about it at length, said that he understood and would have done the same.

"Who, you?"

"Absolutely."

"Quit joking around. Are you a believer or not?"

"I'm not sure."

He lit a candle. Then, his eyes alighting on the crucifix in the alcove: "How many wretches have turned to him!" And after a pause: "They've completely misrepresented him! It's all Rome's fault, and Vatican politics."

But Bouvard admired the Church for its magnificence, and wished he could have been a cardinal in the Middle Ages. "I would have looked good in purple, admit it!"

Pécuchet's cap, set beside the embers to dry, was still damp. Stretching the cloth, he felt something in the lining. A Saint Joseph medallion fell out. They were disturbed; the fact seemed inexplicable.

Mme. de Naoris wanted to know whether Pécuchet had experienced some sort of change, a new happiness, and she gave herself away with her questions. Once, while he was playing billiards, she had sewn the medallion into his cap.

It was obvious she was in love with him; they could have married, as she was a widow. But he had no inkling of her feelings, which might have been the joy of his life.

Although he appeared to be more religious than Mr. Bouvard, she had commended him to Saint Joseph, who works wonders for conversions.

No one knew better than she about rosary beads and the indulgences they procure, the effects of relics, the privileges of holy waters. Her watch hung from a chain that had touched the bonds of Saint Peter. Among the charms on her bracelet gleamed a golden pearl, a replica of the one in the church of Alouagne that holds a tear from Our Lord. A ring on her little finger contained hairs from the priest of Ars. And as she gathered medicinal plants for the sick, her room looked at once like a sacristy and an apothecary's dispensary.

She spent her time writing letters, visiting the poor, breaking up cohabitations, and disseminating pictures of the Sacred Heart. A gentleman was supposed to send her some "martyrs' paste," a concoction made from Pascal wax and human dust taken from the catacombs. It is used in desperate cases, taken in either capsules or pills. She promised some to Pécuchet.

He was shocked by such materialism.

In the evening, a manservant from the chateau brought him a basketful of pamphlets, relating pious phrases by the great Napoleon, witticisms made by priests while staying at inns, and horrifying deaths suffered by nonbelievers. Mme. de Naoris knew all these by heart, along with an infinity of miracles.

She described stupid ones—miracles with no purpose, as if God had performed them merely to astound mankind. Her very own grandmother had once stored some prunes wrapped in cloth in a cupboard, and when they opened the cupboard a year later they found thirteen of them on the cloth, in the shape of a cross. "Explain *that*!" This was her favorite expression after one of her stories, which she maintained with the stubbornness of a mule. In all other respects she was a good woman, with a cheerful

disposition.

Still, one time, she "stepped out of character." Bouvard was contesting the miracle of Pezilla: a fruit bowl in which they had hidden communion hosts during the Revolution turned gold all by itself.

Perhaps it had simply yellowed a bit, owing to the dampness?

"No, no, and again no! The gilding was caused by contact with the Eucharist!" And as proof, she offered up attestations by the bishops. "They said it was like a shield, a…a palladium on the diocese of Perpignan. Just ask Mr. Jeufroy!"

Bouvard couldn't take it any longer—and having reviewed his Louis Hervieu, he brought Pécuchet along with him.

The curate was just finishing dinner. Reine offered them chairs, and at a gesture went to fetch two small glasses, which she filled with rosolio. After which, Bouvard revealed the reason for his visit.

The priest's answer was not very straightforward. For God, he said, everything is possible, and miracles are a proof of religion.

"And yet, there are laws."

"That has nothing to do with it. He breaks them in order to instruct, to correct."

"How can we know if he's breaking them?" retorted Bouvard. "So long as nature follows its routine, we don't give it a second thought. But the moment something out of the ordinary happens, we see the hand of God at work."

"It might well be," said the clergyman, "and when an event can be verified by witnesses…"

"Witnesses will swallow anything—there are also false miracles!"

The preacher's face turned red: "No doubt…sometimes."

"How can we tell the real ones? And if the real ones given as proof need to be proven themselves, what's the point?"

Reine broke in and, preaching like her employer, said that theirs was to obey. "Life is but a passage, but death is eternal!"

"In short," Bouvard added, downing the rosolio, "the ancient miracles are no more demonstrated than the modern ones. You can use similar reasons to defend those of the Christians and those of the pagans."

The priest threw his fork on the table: "*Those* were false—there you go again! There are no miracles outside of the Church!"

"What do you know?" Pécuchet thought to himself. "The same argument as for martyrs. The doctrine relies on the facts and the facts on the doctrine."

Mr. Jeufroy, having drunk a glass of water, resumed: "Even while denying them, you believe. The world converted by twelve fishermen—that is quite a miracle, don't you think?"

"Not at all!" Pécuchet explained it differently. "Monotheism comes from the

Hebrews, the Trinity from the Indians, the Logos belongs to Plato, and the Virgin Mother to Asia."

No matter! Mr. Jeufroy clung to the supernatural, not wanting Christianity to have any human reason for being, even though he detected traces, precursors, or distortions of it in every population. The mocking disbelief of the eighteenth century he could have tolerated; what exasperated him were the polite critiques of modern times.

"I prefer the blaspheming atheist to the quibbling skeptic!"

Then he gave them both a look of defiance, as if in dismissal.

Pécuchet returned home feeling melancholy. He had hoped for an accord between faith and reason. Bouvard made him read this passage from Louis Hervieu:

"To see what a gulf lies between them, one should set their axioms side-by-side.

"Reason says that the whole includes the part; and faith answers with transubstantiation. Jesus having communion with his apostles holds his body in his hand and his head in his mouth.

"Reason says, one is not responsible for the crimes of others; and faith answers with Original Sin.

"Reason says, three equals three; and faith states that three is one."

And they stopped visiting the priest.

It was the time of the Italian War. All right-thinking people trembled for the pope's safety. They railed against Victor Emmanuel. Mme. de Naoris went so far as to wish him dead.

Bouvard and Pécuchet raised only mild objections. At the chateau, when the salon door swung open before them and they saw themselves reflected in the tall mirrors, while through the windows they could make out well-groomed paths and a domestic's red waistcoat cutting across the greenery, they felt a distinct pleasure. The luxuriousness of the setting made them feel much more accepting of the words being spoken there.

The count lent them Mr. de Maistre's complete works. He often expounded on their principal themes to a group of intimates: Hurel, the priest, the justice of the peace, the notary, and the baron, his future son-in-law, who occasionally came to spend twenty-four hours at the chateau.

"The abominable thing," the count was saying, "is the spirit of '89! First they challenge God, then they question the government, then comes freedom: freedom to insult, to revolt, to have orgies, or rather to pillage—to the point where the church and the powers that be have no choice but to ban the independents and heretics. No doubt people will cry persecution! As if executioners persecuted criminals. In short, no State without God! We cannot respect the law unless it comes from on high. And these days, the real issue is not the Italians, but knowing which side will be victorious, the revolution or the pope, Satan or Jesus Christ!"

Mr. Jeufroy approved with monosyllables, Hurel with a smile, the justice by

bobbing his head. Bouvard and Pécuchet stared at the ceiling; Mme. de Naoris, the countess, and Yolande continued their needlework for the poor; and Mr. de Mahurot, next to his fiancée, browsed through the newspaper.

Then there were silences, when everyone seemed to be lost in a particular problem. Napoleon III was no longer a savior, and he even set a deplorable example by letting the masons work on the Tuilleries on Sundays.

"One should not allow" was the count's favorite phrase. Social economy, art, literature, history, scientific doctrines: he decided on everything, in his capacity as a Christian and head of a family—and God willing, the government would exercise the same rigor in this regard as he did in his household! Only the state can judge the dangers of science. When spread too far and wide it inspires morbid ambitions in the populace. Poor populace, they were better off when lords and bishops could temper the king's absolutism. Now industrialists exploited them and they were heading back into slavery!

Everyone missed the old regime—Hurel out of obsequiousness, Coulon out of ignorance, and Marescot as an artist.

Once back home, Bouvard dipped back into La Mettrie, Holbach, et al., and Pécuchet moved away from a religion that had become a form of government. Mr. de Mahurot had taken communion the better to win over "the ladies," and if he practiced, it was for his servants' sake.

A mathematician and dilettante, devotee of Toeppfer, able to play waltzes on the piano, he was distinguished by his unthreatening skepticism: what they said about feudal abuses, the Inquisition, or Jesuits was just prejudice! And he extolled progress, while looking down on anyone who wasn't well-bred or hadn't been to the Polytechnic.

Nor did they care very much for Mr. Jeufroy. He believed in hocus pocus, made jokes about idols, and claimed that all languages derived from Hebrew. His rhetoric was predictable. Invariably he spoke of the deer at bay, honey and absinthe, gold and lead, aromas, urns—and the Christian soul, which he compared to a soldier facing down sin: "Thou shalt not pass!" To avoid his lectures, they arrived at the chateau as late as possible.

One day, however, they found him there.

He had been awaiting his two pupils for an hour. Suddenly Mme. de Naoris came rushing in.

"The little girl has disappeared. I'm bringing Victor. Oh, that wretched child!"

She had found a silver die in his pocket that had been missing for three days. Then, choking on her sobs: "And that's not all! That's not all! While I was scolding him, he showed me his behind!" And before the count and countess could say a word: "Oh, it's all my fault. Forgive me!"

She had concealed from them that the two orphans were the offspring of Touache,

who was now in jail.

What was to be done? If the count sent them away, they were lost—and his act of charity would look like mere whimsy.

Abbé Jeufroy was not surprised. Man being corrupt by nature, he could only be improved through punishment.

Bouvard protested: understanding worked better.

But the count, again, favored the iron fist, which was as indispensable to children as it was to populations. These two were full of vices; the girl was a liar and the boy a roughneck. The theft could ultimately be excused, but insolence, never: education must teach respect above all. And so Sorel the gamekeeper would administer a sound spanking to the young man.

Mr. de Mahurot, who had something to tell him, offered to convey the message. He took a rifle from the foyer and called to Victor, who was standing in the middle of the courtyard with his head down.

"Follow me!" said Mahurot.

As the road to the gamekeeper's more or less went by Chavignolles, Mr. Jeufroy, Bouvard, and Pécuchet would accompany him.

Once they were a few yards away from the chateau, he asked them to be silent as they skirted the woods.

The grounds tumbled down to the riverbanks, where large slabs of rock stood. The water made golden patches beneath the setting sun. Opposite them, the green cliffs were covered in shadow. A cool breeze blew.

Rabbits emerged from their warrens and began grazing on the grass.

A gunshot sounded, then a second, then a third—and the rabbits jumped, bolted. Victor rushed onto them to grab them up, and he panted, covered in sweat.

"Fix your togs," said the baron. The boy's tattered shirt was stained with blood.

The sight of blood repelled Bouvard. He did not believe it should be shed.

Mr. Jeufroy replied, "Circumstances sometimes dictate it. If the guilty man does not shed his own, then it must be someone else's—a truth taught us by the Redemption."

According to Bouvard, it hadn't done much good, since all men were damned despite Our Lord's sacrifice.

"But he renews it daily in the Eucharist."

"And the miracle," said Pécuchet, "is performed with words, however unworthy the officiant might be!"

"That, my dear sir, is the mystery!"

Meanwhile, Victor's eyes were glued to the rifle, which he even tried to touch.

"Get your paws off!" And Mr. de Mahurot took a path into the woods.

The clergyman had Pécuchet on one side, Bouvard on the other. He whispered to them, "Watch what you say: *Debetur pueris*, you know."

Bouvard assured him that he was prostrate before the Creator, but found it outrageous that they had made Him into a man. “We fear His vengeance, we work for His glory. He has all the virtues, an arm, an eye, political views, a home. ‘Our Father who art in heaven’—what does that mean?”

And Pécuchet added, “The world has grown; Earth is no longer the center. It rotates among an infinite multitude of its equals. Many planets are larger than it, and this belittling of our world procures a more sublime ideal of God.” Thus religion had to change. The whole notion of Heaven was infantile, with its blessed who sat around singing and meditating, and watching the tortures of the damned from on high. To think that Christianity was based on an apple!

The priest waxed indignant. “Why not just deny the Revelation, while you’re at it!”

“But how can you say that God spoke?” said Bouvard.

“Prove that He didn’t speak!” said Jeufroy.

“Who says He did in the first place?”

“The Church!”

“Some authority!”

This discussion bored Mr. de Mahurot; and while pressing forward into the woods: “Just go with the priest! He knows more about it than you.”

Bouvard and Pécuchet signaled to each other to take a different path; then, at Croix-Verte: “Well, good evening.”

“At your service,” said the baron.

All this would be reported to Mr. de Faverges, and the result might even be a break in relations. Too bad! They felt despised by those aristocrats; they were never invited to dinner; and they were tired of Mme. de Naoris and her constant admonishments.

Still, they couldn’t just keep the de Maistre, and so two weeks later they returned to the chateau, thinking they wouldn’t be received. They were.

The entire family was in the boudoir, including Hurel and, oddly enough, Foureau.

Punishment had done little to correct Victor. He refused to learn his catechism, and filthy words came from Victorine’s mouth. In short, the boy would go to the reformatory and the little girl to a convent. Foureau had taken charge of the process, and he was about to leave when the countess called him back.

They were waiting for Mr. Jeufroy so that they could set a date for the part of the wedding that would take place at town hall, which they wanted to keep far in advance of the church wedding to show in what low esteem they held the civil ceremony.

Foureau defended it. The count and Hurel attacked it. What was a municipal functionary compared to the priesthood! And the baron would not have considered himself truly married if it had taken place only before a tricolor sash.

“Bravo!” said Mr. Jeufroy, entering. “Marriage having been established by Jesus…”

Pécuchet interrupted him: “In which Gospel? In apostolic times, it was placed so

low that Tertullian compared it to adultery."

"Oh, now really!"

"Seriously! And it's not a sacrament! For a sacrament, you need a sign. Show me the sign in marriage!" The priest tried answering that it represented the alliance of God and the Church, but to no avail. "You don't understand Christianity! And the law…"

"The law shows traces of the sacrament," said Mr. de Faverges. "Without Christianity, the law would sanction polygamy!"

A voice responded, "What's wrong with that?" It was Bouvard, half hidden by a curtain. "One could have several wives, like the patriarchs, the Mormons, or the Muslims, and still be an honest man!"

"Never!" cried the priest. "Honesty consists in rendering what is due. We owe our homage to God. He who isn't Christian is not honest!"

"He's as honest as anyone else," said Bouvard.

The count, hearing this retort as an attack on religion, took up its defense. It had freed the slaves.

Bouvard cited several sources that proved the opposite: "Saint Paul advises them to obey their masters as they obey Jesus. Saint Ambrose calls servitude a gift from God. Leviticus, Exodus, and the councils ratify it. Bossuet lists it among the rights of men. And Monsignor Bouvier approves of it."

The count objected that Christianity had helped spread civilization, no less.

"As well as laziness, by making a virtue of poverty!"

"And what, sir, about the morality of the Gospel?"

"Oh! Oh! It's hardly as moral as all that! Workers are paid the same at the end as at the beginning. Charity goes to those who already possess and is taken away from those in need. As for the precept of turning the other cheek and letting oneself be robbed, it encourages only the impudent, the cowardly, and the arrogant."

The uproar doubled when Pécuchet declared he preferred Buddhism.

The priest burst out laughing: "Buddhism? Ha, ha, ha!"

Mme. de Naoris threw her arms in the air: "Buddhism!"

"What? Buddhism?" repeated the count.

"Do you know it?" Pécuchet asked Mr. Jeufroy, who sputtered in confusion. "Well, then, get to know it! More than Christianity, and well before it, it recognized the vanity of earthly things. Its practices are austere, its believers outnumber all the Christians, and as for incarnation, Vishnu is not one but nine! See for yourself!"

"Travelers' tales!" said Mme. de Naoris.

"Supported by Freemasons," the priest added.

And everyone spoke at once: "Go on!" "Oh please!" "That's a good one!" "You've got to be joking!" "That's not possible"—to the point where Pécuchet, exasperated, declared that he was becoming a Buddhist.

"You are offending these good Christian women!" said the baron. Mme. de Naoris collapsed into a chair. The countess and Yolande fell silent. The count rolled his eyes. Hurel awaited his orders. The priest, to calm himself, read his breviary.

His example appeased Mr. de Faverges. And glaring at his two visitors: "Before casting aspersions on the Gospel, there are certain reparations one should make when one has stains in one's own life…"

"What reparations?"

"What stains?"

"Come, gentlemen, you know perfectly well what I'm talking about!" Then, to Foureau: "Sorel has been notified. Get going!" And Bouvard and Pécuchet took their leave without a word of goodbye.

At the end of the alleyway, the three of them vented their resentment. "They treat me like a servant," grumbled Foureau, and the others agreed. Despite the memory of his hemorrhoids, he felt a kind of sympathy for them.

A road crew was working beside the fields. The foreman came up to them: it was Gorgu. They started talking. He was overseeing the pebbling of the road they'd voted in 1848, and owed his job to Mr. de Mahurot, the engineer. "The one who's planning to marry Mlle. de Faverges. You've just come from there, right?"

"For the last time!" Pécuchet said harshly.

Gorgu put on an innocent face. "A quarrel? You don't say."

And if they had seen his expression when they turned on their heels, they would have realized he'd divined the cause.

A bit farther on they stopped before a trellised enclosure, inside of which were dog kennels and a small house covered in red tiles.

Victorine was at the doorway. The air was loud with barking. The gamekeeper's wife appeared. Knowing why the mayor had come, she called for Victor. Everything was prepared in advance, their belongings bundled in two handkerchiefs held shut with pins. "Safe journey!" she said, happy to be rid of those vermin.

Was it their fault they had a criminal for a father? On the contrary, they seemed very sweet, not even concerned with where they were being taken.

Bouvard and Pécuchet watched them walking in front.

Victorine sang words they couldn't make out, her bundle over her arm, like a dressmaker's assistant carrying a package. Sometimes she looked back, and Pécuchet, seeing her blond curls and her comely gait, regretted not having a child like that. Raised in other conditions, she would have been a charmer. What joy to watch her grow up, to hear her birdlike song every day, to give her kisses whenever he wanted—and a feeling of tenderness rose from his heart to his lips, moistened his eyelids, made him feel oppressed.

Victor had put his bundle on his back, like a soldier. He whistled, threw stones at

the crows in the furrows, strayed under the trees to cut himself a walking stick. Foureau called him back; and Bouvard, holding him by the hand, was delighted to feel those childish fingers, so robust and vigorous. All the poor little devil wanted was to grow freely, like a flower in the great outdoors! He would rot between walls, with lessons, punishments, a heap of stupidities! Bouvard was seized by a jolt of pity, a flare of indignation against fate, one of those rages that make you want to pull down the government.

"Go on!" he said. "Have fun. Enjoy the time you've got left!"

The boy ran off.

He and his sister would sleep at the inn. At dawn, the coachman from Falaise would bring Victor to the Beaubourg penitentiary, and a nun from the orphanage in Grand-Camp would come for Victorine.

Foureau, having given these details, plunged back into his thoughts. But Bouvard wanted to know how much it cost to raise two kids.

"Bah! Maybe three hundred or so! The count gave me twenty-five for my initial expenses. A real piker, that one!"

And with the count's denigration of his official sash weighing heavy on his heart, Foureau silently quickened his pace.

Bouvard murmured, "They make me sad. I'd gladly take them in!"

"Me too," said Pécuchet, having had the same thought.

No doubt there were impediments.

"None!" answered Foureau. Moreover, as mayor he had the right to give abandoned children to whomever he saw fit. And after a long hesitation: "Well, why not? Take them! That'll really boil his potatoes!"

Bouvard and Pécuchet led them away.

Returning home, they found Marcel on his knees at the foot of the stairway, praying fervently beneath the Madonna. His head thrown back, eyes half-closed, and dilating his harelip, he looked like a fakir in ecstasy.

"What a brute!" said Bouvard.

"Why's that? He might be experiencing things that would make you envious if you saw them. Aren't there two completely distinct worlds? The object of reasoning is less important than the manner of reasoning. What difference does it make what you believe? The main thing is to believe."

And that was Pécuchet's objection to Bouvard's remark.

Ten

THEY PROCURED SEVERAL BOOKS about education and settled on a system. All metaphysical ideas would be banned. They would use the experimental method to let nature take its course. There was no hurry: first the children had to forget what they had previously learned.

Although the two siblings had a solid constitution, Pécuchet, in Spartan fashion, wanted to harden them further, get them used to hunger, thirst, inclement weather; he even thought to have them wear shoes with holes in them to build resistance to colds. Bouvard was opposed.

The storeroom at the end of the hall became the children's bedroom. It was furnished with two trestle beds, two basins, and a pitcher. A bull's-eye window opened above their heads, and spiders ran along the plaster walls.

Often they remembered the inside of a cabin where there was shouting. Their father came home one night with blood on his hands. Some time later the police showed up. They lived in the woods. Some men who made clogs used to kiss their mom. Then she died. A cart had carried them off. They were beaten a lot; lost their way. Then they saw the police, Mme. de Naoris, Sorel, and without wondering about the reasons for this new house, they were happy here. And so it was a painful shock when after eight months the lessons started up again.

Bouvard took charge of the little girl, Pécuchet of the boy.

Victor could tell his letters, but couldn't form syllables. He stammered, stopped short, and stared dumbly. Victorine asked questions. Why did *ch* sound like a *k* in *orchestra* but like a *tch* in *archbishop*? Sometimes you had to blend two vowels and other times pronounce them separately. It wasn't fair; she got angry.

The schoolmasters taught at the same hour, in their respective rooms—and since the walls were thin, the four voices, one fluty, one deep, and two shrill, composed an abominable cacophony. To put an end to it and give the kids an example to follow, they decided to teach them together in the museum. And they started in on writing.

The two pupils, one at each end of the table, copied a sample. But their posture was bad. They had to be straightened up. Their pages fell, their pens broke, and the inkwell tipped over.

On certain days, Victorine worked well for five minutes, then began doodling—and, utterly disheartened, she stared at the ceiling. Victor quickly dozed off, sprawled

over his desk.

Were they ill? Too much tension can damage young minds. “Let’s stop awhile,” said Bouvard.

Nothing is more absurd than learning by rote. But if the memory isn’t exerted, it will atrophy; and they tried drumming into them the first fables of La Fontaine. The children approved of the ant that hoarded, the wolf that ate the sheep, the lion that claimed every share.

Becoming bolder, they demolished the garden. But what sort of entertainment was there around here?

Rousseau, in *Emile*, advises the tutor to have the student create his own toys, with as little guidance as possible. But Bouvard couldn’t manage to make a hoop, nor Pécuchet to sew a ball.

They moved on to educational pastimes, such as making cutouts or starting a fire with a magnifying glass. Pécuchet showed them his microscope—and since the candle was lit, Bouvard made a rabbit or pig on the wall with the shadow of his fingers. The audience grew bored.

Certain authors extol the pleasures of a picnic or a boat ride. But honestly, was this feasible? Fénelon recommends a “harmless conversation” now and again. It was impossible to imagine a single one.

They went back to their lessons. And alphabet blocks, lined paper, and printing sets had all failed when they hit upon a strategy.

Since Victor had a tendency toward gluttony, they showed him the name of a dish; soon he was reading fluently in *French Cookery*. Victorine was a flirt, so they promised her a dress if she wrote to the dressmaker to order it. In less than three weeks, she accomplished this miracle. It meant appealing to their character flaws, a pernicious approach, but it worked.

Now that they knew how to read and write, what was left to teach them?

Another sticking point. Girls don’t need to be as well schooled as boys. No matter! Normally they are raised like veritable primitives, their entire baggage limited to mystical nonsense.

Was it a good idea to teach them languages? “Spanish and Italian,” claimed the Swan of Cambrai, “are useful only for reading dangerous works,” which struck them as asinine. Still, Victorine would have no use for those languages, whereas English was more commonly employed. Pécuchet studied its rules, and earnestly demonstrated the way of pronouncing *th*: “It’s like this, look—*the*, *the*, *the*.”

But before teaching a child, one must know his aptitudes. These can be divined through phrenology. They delved into it, then decided to verify its assertions on their own persons. Bouvard had the bumps signifying benevolence, imagination, veneration, and amorous energy—or in common parlance, eroticism. Pécuchet’s temporal lobes

suggested philosophy and enthusiasm, along with a sense of cunning. Such were their personalities.

What surprised them more was that both had the marks of a heightened tendency toward friendship; and charmed by this discovery, they hugged each other tenderly.

Next, their examinations focused on Marcel.

His greatest flaw, as they knew all too well, was his enormous appetite. Nonetheless, Bouvard and Pécuchet were horrified to note above the pinna of his ear, at eye level, the organ for appetite. With age, their domestic might become like that woman in La Salpêtrière, who put away eight pounds of bread a day, once consumed twelve helpings of soup, and another time drank sixty bowls of coffee. They couldn't keep up with that.

Their pupils' heads had nothing unusual about them. No doubt they were going about it poorly. A very simple procedure would help them gain experience. On market days, they threaded their way through the peasants in the square, among the sacks of grain, baskets of cheeses, calves, and horses, heedless of being jostled—and when they found a small boy with his father, they asked if they could palpate his skull for scientific purposes.

Most didn't even bother answering. Others, thinking they were trying to sell ringworm ointment, angrily refused. A few indifferent souls let themselves be led onto the church porch, where they could practice in peace.

One morning, as Bouvard and Pécuchet were beginning their maneuvers, the priest suddenly appeared and, seeing what they were up to, accused phrenology of promoting materialism and fatalism. The thief, the murderer, and the adulterer had only to lay all responsibility for their crimes on their bumps.

Bouvard objected that the organ might predispose you to certain actions, but didn't force you to commit them. Even if a man had a tendency toward depravity, that in itself didn't make him depraved. "Besides, I have to hand it to the orthodoxy. It supports innate ideas but rejects penchants. Talk about an inconsistency!"

But according to Mr. Jeufroy, phrenology contradicted divine omnipotence, and it was unseemly to practice it in the shadow of the holy place, within sight of the altar itself. "Away with you, now, go on!"

They set up shop at Ganot the hairdresser's. To overcome any hesitation, Bouvard and Pécuchet went so far as to treat the parents to a shave or a curling.

One afternoon, the doctor came in to have his hair cut. Sitting in the chair, he saw, reflected in the mirror, the two phrenologists parading their fingers over a kid's noggin.

"Have you sunk to that idiocy?" he asked.

"What idiocy?"

Vaucorbeil gave a disdainful smile, then stated that the brain did not contain a multitude of organs. One man, for instance, could digest foods that another could not.

Should we then suppose that the stomach contained as many stomachs as there were foodstuffs?

Still, one form of work can provide relaxation from another; one intellectual effort does not strain all the mental faculties at once. Each one therefore has a distinct center. "No anatomist has found it," said Vaucorbeil.

"That's because they dissected poorly," retorted Pécuchet.

"What?"

"Of course! They cut in slices, with no thought whatsoever for the connections between parts"—a sentence he remembered reading in a book.

"That's the most idiotic thing I've ever heard!" cried the doctor. "The skull is not molded on the brain, the exterior on the interior. Gall is mistaken, and I defy you to validate his theories. Let's pick three people at random right here in this shop."

The first was a peasant woman with large blue eyes. Examining her, Pécuchet said, "She has an excellent memory."

Her husband confirmed this, and offered himself as the next subject. "Oh! You, my good man, are not the type to be ordered about."

According to the others, no one in the world was more thickheaded.

The third test was conducted on a boy led up by his grandmother. Pécuchet stated that he must love music.

"I'll say!" said the old woman. "Show these gentlemen, just to see!"

The boy pulled a Jew's harp from his blouse and started to pluck it. There was a loud noise: the door, slammed violently by the doctor on his way out.

They no longer harbored any doubts about themselves, and calling for their two charges began once more to analyze their skulls.

Victorine's was generally of a piece, a sign of level-headedness—but her brother's was deplorable! A very strong protuberance in the mastoidian angle of the parietal bone indicated the organ of destructiveness and murder, and lower down, a bulge signified acquisitiveness and theft. Bouvard and Pécuchet were distraught for an entire week.

Still, it was important to define what these words meant. What people call combativeness implied a disregard of death. While such a person might commit homicides, he might also save lives. Acquisitiveness encompasses the stealth of swindlers and the ardor of business tycoons. Irreverence is analogous to the critical spirit, cunning to circumspection. An instinct always splits into two parts, one bad and one good. You can destroy the former by cultivating the latter. And by this method, a daring child, rather than becoming a bandit, might turn into a general. The coward might simply be prudent, the miser economical, the spendthrift generous.

A magnificent dream consumed them. If they succeeded with their pupils' education, they would found an institution whose purpose would be to rectify minds, straighten out personalities, ennoble hearts. They were already talking about

subscriptions and building new wings.

Their triumph at Ganot's had made them famous. People came to consult them, to be told their chances for fortune.

All sorts of skulls filed in: bubble-shaped, pear-shaped, loaf-shaped; square ones, high ones, crushed-in ones, flat ones; with ox-like jaws, birdlike faces, and pig-like eyes. All these bodies interfered with the hairdresser's work. Elbows jostled the glass cabinet containing the scented oils, combs were knocked over, the basin broke; and he threw all those customers out, asking Bouvard and Pécuchet to follow suit—an ultimatum they accepted without a qualm, having grown a bit tired of cranioscopy.

The next day, as they were walking by the captain's garden, they saw him chatting with Girbal, Coulon, the rural policeman, and his youngest son, Zéphyrin, dressed as an altar boy. His robe was brand new; he was walking around in it before giving it back to the sacristy, and soaking in the congratulations.

Placquevent asked the gentlemen to palpate his son, curious to know what they'd think.

The skin of his forehead seemed taut; a thin nose, very cartilaginous at the tip, fell obliquely onto his pinched lips; his chin was pointed, his eyes evasive, his right shoulder too high.

"Take off your skull cap," his father said.

Bouvard slid his hands under the boy's straw-colored hair; then it was Pécuchet's turn. And they shared their observations underneath their breath: "Manifest biophilia! Aha! approbativeness! Absence of conscientiousness! Zero amativeness!"

"So?" said the policeman.

Pécuchet opened his tobacco pouch and took a pinch.

"Nothing good, eh?"

"Well," answered Bouvard, "it's not great."

Placquevent blushed with humiliation. "Still, he'll do as I tell him."

"Oh! Oh!"

"But I'm his father, damn it, and it's my right…!"

"Within limits," said Pécuchet.

Girbal joined in: "Paternal authority is indisputable."

"And what if the father is an idiot?"

"Doesn't matter!" said the captain. "His power is no less absolute."

"It's in the child's best interest," added Coulon.

According to Bouvard and Pécuchet, children owed nothing to their progenitors, while parents, on the contrary, owed them food, education, an origin—in short, everything.

The burghers shouted in indignation at this immoral viewpoint. Placquevent was wounded as if by an insult:

"Yeah, and those are some fine specimens you picked up on the highway! They'll go far! You just watch yourself."

"Just watch what?" Pécuchet said sharply.

"Oh, I'm not afraid of you!"

"That makes two of us!"

Coulin intervened, calmed the policeman down, and led him away.

For several minutes everyone remained silent. Then the topic turned to dahlias, and the captain would not let his audience go until he had shown off every last one of them.

Bouvard and Pécuchet were just returning home when, several yards up the road, they saw Placquevent with Zéphyrin beside him, his elbow raised as a kind of shield to ward off slaps.

What they had just heard was another way of expressing what the count had said. But the example of their pupils showed the superiority of freedom over constraint. Nevertheless, a little discipline was called for.

Pécuchet nailed up a blackboard in the museum. They would keep a journal, in which a child's actions, noted every evening, would be read out the next day. Everything would be regulated by the sound of a bell. Like Dupont de Nemours, they would first use paternal commands, then military commands, and casual forms of address were forbidden.

Bouvard tried to teach Victorine calculus. Sometimes he made a mistake and they both laughed about it. Then, with a kiss on the neck, at the place where no beard grew, she asked if she could be excused. He let her go.

Pécuchet, at lesson times, yanked on the bell and shouted his military commands out the window until he was hoarse, but the boy didn't come. His socks were always bunched around his ankles. Even at the dinner table, he shoved his fingers up his nose and made not the slightest effort to hold in his gases. On that score, Broussais forbade reprimands, for "one must obey the call of a self-preserving instinct."

Victorine and he used awful language, saying "drank" for "drink," "her" for "she," and other bits of local jargon. But since the rules of grammar cannot be understood by children, and since they'll learn it if they hear it spoken correctly, the two men watched over their own speech so carefully that they could barely utter a word.

They had divergent opinions about geography. Bouvard felt it was more logical to start locally, Pécuchet with the world at large.

With a hose and some sand, they tried to demonstrate what a river was, an island, a gulf, and even sacrificed three flowerbeds for the three continents. But the cardinal points did not manage to penetrate Victor's head.

One January night, Pécuchet led him into the fields. While walking, he extolled the wonders of astronomy: navigators used it in their voyages; without it, Christopher Columbus would never have made his discovery. We owe a debt of gratitude to

Copernicus, Galileo, Newton.

It was freezing out, and an infinity of stars twinkled against the blue-black sky.

Pécuchet raised his eyes. What—no Big Dipper? The last time he'd seen it, it was turned to the other side. He finally recognized it, then showed the polar star, always to the North, by which one can orient oneself.

The next day he placed an armchair in the middle of the salon and began waltzing around it. "Imagine that this chair is the Sun and I am the Earth. This is how it moves."

Victor gaped at him in astonishment.

Then he took an orange, slid a rod through it to signify the poles, then drew a line around it with charcoal to mark the equator. After which, he ran the orange around a candle, pointing out that not all points of the surface were lit at the same time, which produces the difference in climates. For the difference in seasons he tipped the orange, for the earth does not sit straight, which causes equinoxes and solstices.

Victor hadn't understood a thing. He believed that the Earth pivoted on a long needle and that the equator was a ring around its circumference.

With the help of an atlas, Pécuchet showed him Europe. But dazzled by so many lines and colors, he couldn't find the names. The valleys and mountains did not match the kingdoms; the political boundaries conflicted with the physical ones.

Perhaps all this would become clearer if they studied history.

It would have been more practical to begin with the village, then the district, the region, and the province. But since Chavignolles kept no records, they had to go with world history.

It is laden with so many events that one must limit oneself to the highlights.

For the Greeks, there was "We'll fight in the shade," the jealous rival who ostracized Aristides, Alexander's faith in his doctor; for the Romans, the Capitoline geese, Scaevola's brazier, Regulus's barrel. Cuauhtemoc's bed of roses was enough for America. As for France, it had the vase of Soissons, Saint Louis's oak, the death of Joan of Arc, Henry IV's chicken in the pot—an embarrassment of riches, not counting "Help me, Auvergne" and the wreck of the *Vengeur*!

Victor mixed up figures, centuries, and countries. Still, Pécuchet was not about to burden him with the subtleties, and the masses of facts presented a real labyrinth.

He tried teaching the names of the French kings. Victor forgot them, since he didn't know the sequence. But if Dumouchel's mnemonic had not worked for them, what could it possibly do for him? Conclusion: history can only be learned through massive reading. He would do it.

Drawing is useful in a host of circumstances, and Pécuchet had the temerity to teach it himself—from life!—beginning with landscapes. A stationer in Bayeux sent him paper, erasers, two boards, pencils, and fixative for their finished works, which, when framed under glass, would embellish the museum.

Up at dawn, they hit the road, a piece of bread in their pockets—and much time was wasted choosing a site. Pécuchet tried to depict simultaneously what was at his feet, the distant horizon, and the clouds. But the distance always dominated the foreground; the river poured from the sky; the shepherd trod on his flocks; and a sleeping dog looked like it was running. He gave up on his own efforts.

He recalled having read this definition: "Drawing is composed of three things: line, shading, and fine shading, as well as the finishing stroke, but only the master can provide the finishing stroke." And so he corrected the line, helped with the shading, watched over the fine shading, and awaited an opportunity to provide the finishing stroke, but it never came, as his student's landscapes were unintelligible.

His sister, who was just as lazy, yawned over Pythagoras's table. Mlle. Reine showed her how to sew—and when she marked the linens, she raised her fingers so prettily that Bouvard didn't have the heart to torment her with math lessons. They'd get back to them soon enough.

No doubt arithmetic and stitching are necessary skills for a home. But it was cruel, Pécuchet observed, to raise girls exclusively for the benefit of the husband they'd have one day. Not every woman was destined for Hymen. And if the goal was to help them manage on their own, they would need to learn many things.

One can inculcate the sciences by referring to the most commonplace objects—such as by telling what wine is made of. And once the explanation was provided, Victor and Victorine were made to repeat it. It was the same story for spices, furniture, and lighting. But lighting, for them, meant the lamp, and had nothing in common with the spark from a stone, the flame from a candle, or the light of the moon.

One day, Victorine asked why it was that wood burned. Her teachers looked at each other in embarrassment, the theory of combustion being beyond them.

Another time, Bouvard, from the soup to the cheese, held forth about the elements of nutrition, and dumbfounded the two little ones with fibrin, casein, fats, and gluten.

After that, Pécuchet tried explaining how blood is regenerated, but he got entangled in the circulatory system.

The dilemma was not easily resolved. If one begins with facts, the simplest ones require reasons that are too complex; and by first setting forth the principles, one starts out with the absolute, in other words with faith.

One solution was to combine the two approaches, rational and empirical. But isn't a twin path to a single goal contrary to the method?—Oh, too bad!

To initiate the youngsters into the natural sciences, they tried taking nature walks. "You see?" they said, pointing out a donkey, a horse, or an ox. "Animals with four feet are called quadrupeds. Birds have feathers, reptiles have scales, and butterflies belong to the class of insects." They had brought a net to catch some—and Pécuchet, holding the bug delicately between his fingers, made them observe the four wings, six legs, two

antennae, and the bony proboscis that sucks nectar from flowers.

He plucked herbs on the sides of ditches, saying their names, sometimes making them up so as not to lose face. Besides, nomenclature is the least important part of botany.

He wrote this axiom on the blackboard: "Every plant has leaves, a calyx, and a corolla enclosing an ovary or pericarp that contains the seeds."

Then he sent his students out to collect plants randomly in the fields.

Victor brought back buttercups, a variety of ranunculus with a yellow flower. Victorine brought a tuft of grass; he looked in vain for the pericarp.

Bouvard, who had his doubts, looked through the entire library and discovered the drawing of a rose in an album by Redouté. The ovary wasn't located in the corolla, but under the petals.

"It's an exception," said Pécuchet.

In their garden were some tuberoses, all without calyxes. "An oversight! Most of the Liliaceae don't have one."

They find X, a rubiaceous that has no calyx. Thus Pécuchet's axiom is incorrect. But they chance upon a spurwort (description of the plant), and it has a calyx.*

Really, now! If even the exceptions weren't true, what *could* you trust?

One day, during one of their walks, they heard peacocks crying, stole a glance over the wall, and at first didn't recognize their farm. The barn now had a tile roof, the fences were new, the paths graveled. Old Gouy appeared.

"I can't believe it! Is it really you?" So many events in the last three years, the death of his wife among them. As for him, he was still fit as a fiddle. "Come on in, come sit a spell!"

It was the beginning of April, and the flowering apple trees aligned their white and pink tufts in the three farmyards. There wasn't a cloud in the blue satin sky. Sheets, tablecloths, and towels hung vertically, attached to taut ropes with wooden pegs. Old Gouy lifted them to pass, and they suddenly came face-to-face with Mme. Bordin, bareheaded and in a camisole—while Marianne held out bundles of laundry to her.

"Good day, gentlemen! Make yourselves at home! I'm going to sit for a moment, I'm beat."

The farmer offered everyone a glass of something.

"Not now," she said, "it's too hot."

Pécuchet accepted, and disappeared toward the cellar with Old Gouy, Marianne, and Victor.

Bouvard sat on the ground next to Mme. Bordin. He received her rent payments punctually, had no complaints, held nothing more against her.

The bright light illuminated her profile. One black lock of hair fell too low, and the fuzz on the back of her neck stuck to her amber skin, which was damp with

perspiration. With every breath, her bosom rose and fell. The scent of cut grass mingled with the good aroma of her firm flesh, and Bouvard had a resurgence of his old feelings, which filled him with joy. He complimented her on the property.

She was delighted, and told him of her plans. To expand the orchard, she was going to level the high bank.

Meanwhile, Victorine was climbing its embankment and gathering primroses, hyacinths, and violets, unafraid of an old horse that was grazing at the foot of the wall.

"Isn't she the sweetest?" said Bouvard.

"Oh, yes, little girls are very sweet." And the widow let out a sigh, which seemed to contain the long sorrow of an entire lifetime.

"You could have had one."

She lowered her head. "That was up to you!"

"How do you mean?"

He gave her such a look that she blushed deeply, as if at a crude embrace—but immediately afterward, fanning herself with her handkerchief: "You missed the boat, my friend."

"I don't understand." And without getting up, he moved closer.

She looked him up and down for a long time—then, smiling and with eyes moist, "It's your fault!"

The billowing sheets surrounded them like bed curtains. He leaned on his elbow, brushing his face against her knees.

"Why? Tell me why?" And as she remained silent, and he was in a state where a confession couldn't do any harm, he tried to justify himself, accused himself of madness, of pride: "Forgive me! It will be like before! Don't you want to?" And he took her hand, which she left in his.

A sudden gust of wind raised the hanging laundry and they saw two peacocks, a male and a female. The female was standing motionless, her hocks bent, rear lifted. The male paraded around her, spreading its tail in a fan, puffing its chest, cooing. Then he jumped on her and lowered his feathers, which covered her like a bower—and the two great birds trembled in a single shudder.

Bouvard felt a similar tremor in Mme. Bordin's palm. She quickly pulled her hand away. Standing there, gaping as if petrified, young Victor was watching. A bit farther on, Victorine, lying on her back in the sunlight, was sniffing the flowers she had picked.

The old horse, startled by the peacocks, broke one of the ropes with a sudden kick, got its legs entangled, and galloped around the three yards, dragging the laundry behind it.

Hearing Mme. Bordin's furious shouts, Marianne came running. Old Gouy cursed at his horse: "You goddam old nag! Yoke around my neck! Thief!" And he kicked it in the stomach, swatted its ears with a whip handle.

Bouvard was outraged to see an animal being beaten.

The peasant answered, “It’s my right! I own it.”

That was not a reason.

And Pécuchet, just arriving, added that animals had rights, too, for they had souls just like us—assuming ours even existed.

“You are irreligious!” cried Mme. Bordin.

Three things were bothering her: the laundry that had to be redone, the offense to her beliefs, and fear of having been seen in a compromising position.

“I thought you were stronger than that,” said Bouvard.

She retorted haughtily, “And *I* do not appreciate smuttiness.” Then Gouy lay into them for having ruined his horse, whose nostrils were bleeding. He grumbled underneath his breath, “Lousy troublemakers! I was just about to lock him up when they come along.”

The two men walked off with a shrug.

Victor asked why they had gotten angry with Gouy.

“He abused his strength, which is bad.”

“Why is that bad?”

Could children have no notion of right and wrong? Perhaps so. And that evening, Pécuchet, with Bouvard at his right, some notes in his hand, and his two pupils in front of him, began a course on morality.

This science teaches us to govern our actions. Actions have two motives, pleasure and self-interest—plus a third, more imperious, one: duty.

Duties are divided into two classes. *Primo*, duties to ourselves, which consist in caring for our bodies, keeping us safe from harm. This one they understood perfectly. *Secundo*, duties to others, in other words, always to be loyal, friendly, and even brotherly, as the human race is basically one large family. Oftentimes something we like might harm our fellow men; self-interest is different from the good, for the good is irreducible in itself. The children didn’t follow. He put off for next time the sanction of punishments.

After all that, said Bouvard, he still hadn’t defined what the good was.

“How can you define it? You just feel it.”

In which case, lessons in morality would only benefit moral people; Pécuchet’s courses ceased.

They had their students read stories promoting the love of virtue. Victor found them deadly dull.

To capture his fancy, Pécuchet hung pictures on the walls of his room that illustrated the lives of the Good Boy and the Bad Boy. The former, Adolph, kissed his mother, studied German, helped a blind man, and was accepted into the Polytechnic. The bad one, Eugene, started out by disobeying his father, picked a fight in a café, beat

his wife, fell down drunk, smashed a cabinet, and a final picture showed him in jail, where a gentleman accompanied by a small boy was pointing to him and saying, "Behold, my son, the wages of poor conduct!"

But for children the future doesn't exist. They could preach all they wanted, saturate them with the maxim, "Work is honorable and the rich are sometimes miserable"—these two had known workers who were in no way honorable and remembered that life at the chateau seemed pretty good. The tortures of remorse were described to them in such exaggerated terms that they concluded it must all be a joke and ignored the rest.

They tried to set an example by appealing to their sense of honor, reputation, and glory; by praising great men, especially the useful ones like Belsunce, Franklin, and Jacquard. Victor showed no desire whatsoever to emulate them.

One day when the boy had done a sum without a single mistake, Bouvard sewed a ribbon onto his jacket in guise of a gold star. He strutted about in it. But then he forgot when Henry IV died, and Pécuchet made him wear the donkey's cap. Victor began braying so violently and so long that they had to take off his cardboard ears.

Like him, his sister seemed flattered by praise and indifferent to blame.

In order to make them more sensitive, the two men gave them a black cat, which it was up to them to care for; and two or three *sols*, to give as alms. They found this pretense absurd: the money belonged to them.

Bowing to a desire on the pedagogues' part, they called Bouvard "My Uncle" and Pécuchet "Good Friend." But they also addressed them as *tu*, and half the lessons were usually spent in arguments.

Victorine abused Marcel, climbed onto his back and pulled his hair, talked through her nose to make fun of his harelip; the poor man didn't dare complain, so much did he love that little girl.

One evening, his voice rang out in an unusually loud bellow. Bouvard and Pécuchet rushed down to the kitchen. The two pupils were watching the fireplace—and Marcel, his hands clasped together, was shouting, "Take it out! It's too much! It's too much!"

The cauldron's lid flew off like an exploding grenade. A grayish mass leapt to the ceiling, then turned on itself frantically, emitting horrifying cries.

They recognized the cat, mere skin and bones, hairless, its tail like a shoelace. Its enormous eyes bulged out of its head. They were the color of milk, as if emptied, yet staring.

Still screaming, the hideous beast dove into the hearth, disappeared for a moment, then flopped onto the ashes, inert.

It was Victor who had committed this atrocity; and the two men recoiled, pale with stupefaction and horror. He answered their reproaches like the rural policeman for his son, or the farmer for his horse: "Why shouldn't I? It's mine!"—naively, shamelessly, in the placidity of satisfied instinct.

The boiling water from the cauldron had spilled all over the floor. Saucepans, tongs, and candlesticks were scattered on the tiles. It took Marcel quite a while to clean the kitchen, and his masters buried the poor animal in the garden, beneath the pagoda.

Then Bouvard and Pécuchet had a long conversation about Victor. His father's blood was starting to show. What should they do? Sending him back to Mr. de Faverges or letting others take him in would be an admission of failure. He might still mend his ways by himself.

No matter! The hope was dubious; their tenderness was gone! What a pleasure it would have been to have an adolescent who took an interest in your thoughts, whose progress you could observe, who would later become like a brother. But Victor was lacking in spirit, and even more so in heart! And Pécuchet sighed, bent knee resting in his clasped hands.

"His sister's no better," said Bouvard.

He imagined a young girl of about fifteen, with a delicate soul and cheerful disposition, decorating the house with the elegance of her youth. And as if he had been her father and she had just died, he wept for her.

Then, trying to excuse Victor, they cited Rousseau's opinion: the child bears no responsibility, and can be neither moral nor immoral. These two, according to Pécuchet, had nonetheless reached the age of discernment, and they considered ways of punishing them.

For a punishment to work, says Bentham, it must fit the crime, be its natural consequence. If the child has broken a windowpane, you don't replace it, and he suffers from the cold. If he asks for more food even though he's full, give it to him: his indigestion will be his repentance. If he's lazy, let him remain idle: boredom alone will make him look for an occupation.

But Victor did not suffer from the cold, his temperament could easily endure excesses, and sloth suited him just fine.

They adopted the inverse system, corrective punishment. He was given chores to do; he became only lazier. He was denied jam; his gluttony only increased.

Would sarcasm work better? Once when he had come to lunch with dirty hands, Bouvard laughed at him, calling him dandy, fancy pants, kid gloves. Victor listened with forehead lowered, suddenly went pale, and threw his plate at Bouvard's head—then, furious at having missed, leapt at him. Three men were barely enough to hold him back. He rolled on the floor, tried to bite them. Pécuchet threw water on him from a distance. He immediately calmed down, but remained hoarse for three days. The method was not good.

They tried another. At the slightest sign of anger, they treated him as if he were ill and sent him to bed. Victor was perfectly happy there; they could hear him singing.

One day, he came across an old coconut in the library, and had just begun splitting

it open when Pécuchet walked in.

"My coconut!"

It was a souvenir from Dumouchel! He had brought it all the way from Paris to Chavignolles, and he raised his arms in indignation. Victor started to laugh. "Good Friend" had had enough—and with a round slap sent him tumbling to the other end of the room. Then, trembling with emotion, he went to complain to Bouvard.

Bouvard chided him: "You and your stupid coconut! Hitting just makes him witless, and scare tactics wind him up. You're only making yourself look foolish!"

Pécuchet objected that corporal punishment was sometimes necessary. Pestalozzi used it. The famous Melanchthon admitted that without it, he would never have learned anything.

But cruel punishment has driven children to suicide; there are known cases.

Victor had barricaded himself in his room. Bouvard negotiated behind the door—and to make him open up, promised him a plum pie. After that, things got even worse.

One method still remained, recommended by Dupanloup: "the harsh stare." They tried to imprint their faces with a frightening glare, which had not the slightest effect.

"The only thing we have left to try is religion," said Bouvard.

Pécuchet protested: they had banned it from their program. But reason alone can't meet every need. The heart and the imagination want something else. For many souls, the supernatural is indispensable, and they decided to send the children to catechism.

Reine offered to take them. She had returned to the household, and her affectionate manner won everyone over. Victorine underwent a sudden change, became more reserved, sweeter, knelt before the Madonna, admired Abraham's sacrifice, sneered at the very mention of a Protestant.

She claimed that she had been ordered to fast. They checked: it wasn't true. On the Feast of Corpus Christi, several clumps of dame's violets disappeared from one of the flowerbeds and were found decorating the altar of repose; she flatly denied having cut them. Another time she took twenty *sols* from Bouvard, which she put in the collection plate.

They concluded that morality is distinct from religion. When morality is not grounded in anything, it becomes of secondary importance.

One evening, as they were having dinner, Mr. Marescot entered. Victor immediately ran off.

The notary, refusing to have a seat, got right to the point: Touache junior had beaten and nearly killed his son.

Since they all knew Victor's origins and because he was so unpleasant to be around, the other kids called him "jailbird" a short while before, he had given young Master Arnold Marescot the thrashing of his life. Dear little Arnold bore the traces of it on his body. "His mother is in despair, his clothes are ripped to shreds, and his health has been

compromised. What are you going to do about it?"

The notary demanded a severe punishment, and that Victor be barred from catechism to avoid any future incidents.

Bouvard and Pécuchet, although offended by his arrogant tone, promised whatever he wished and gave in.

Had Victor obeyed a feeling of honor or of vengeance? In either case, he wasn't a coward. But his brutality frightened them. Music soothes the savage breast, so Pécuchet thought to teach him the basics. Victor had great difficulty reading notes and not confusing the terms *adagio*, *presto*, and *sforzando*. His teacher labored to explain scales, triads, diatonics, chromatics, and the two kinds of intervals, major and minor.

He had him stand straight, chest out, mouth wide open; so as to teach by example he forced out intonations in falsetto. Victor's voice squeaked painfully from his contracting larynx. When the measure began with a rest, he came in too early or too late.

Pécuchet nonetheless attempted some two-part harmonies. He picked up a baton and waved his arms majestically, as though he had a full orchestra behind him. But, occupied by both tasks, he mixed up his tempi. His mistake led his student to make some of his own, and with eyes on the score, knitting their brows, straining their neck muscles, they muddled their way to the end of the page.

Finally Pécuchet said to Victor, "You won't exactly be the star of the choir," and he gave up teaching music. "Anyway, maybe Locke was right: it leads you into such dissolute company that you're better off doing something else."

Without wanting to make him a writer, they felt it would be useful for Victor at least to know how to compose a letter. One thought held them back: he could not learn the epistolary style, for it belonged exclusively to women.

They then thought of getting a few pieces of literature into his head; and unable to choose, they consulted Mme. Campan's memoirs. She recommended the Eliacin scene in *Athalie*, the choruses in *Esther*, and Jean-Baptiste Rousseau in his entirety.

It was all a bit old-fashioned. As for novels, she proscribed them, since they painted the world in overly flattering colors. Still, she made an exception for Richardson's *Clarissa Harlowe* and *The Father and Daughter* by Miss Opie. Who was this Miss Opie? They couldn't find her name in Michaud's *Universal Biography*.

There were always fairy tales. "They're going to expect diamond palaces," said Pécuchet. Literature develops the mind but enflames the passions.

Victorine was expelled from catechism because of hers.

They had caught her kissing the notary's son. And Reine wasn't joking! Her face was dead serious beneath her fluted bonnet. After this scandal, how could they possibly keep such a depraved girl?

Bouvard and Pécuchet called the priest a stupid ass. His housekeeper defended him.

They answered back, and she stalked off, rolling her eyes terribly and muttering, “We know all about you! We know all about you!”

Victorine had, in fact, developed a crush on young Arnold, finding him so pretty with his embroidered collar, velvet jacket, and nice-smelling hair; and she brought him bouquets of flowers, until Zéphyrin told on her.

This whole affair was inane! The two children were perfectly innocent.

Was it time to teach them the mysteries of procreation? “I can’t see the harm,” said Bouvard. The philosopher Basedow told his students about it, although he limited his remarks to pregnancy and birth.

Pécuchet saw things differently. Victor was beginning to worry him. He suspected him of having a bad habit. And why not? Worthy men have practiced it all their lives, and some say that the Duke of Angoulême himself indulged in it. He questioned his disciple in such a way that it put ideas in his head, and soon afterward he had no further doubts on the subject.

Then he called him a criminal, and as treatment wanted to make him read Tissot. To Bouvard’s mind, this masterpiece did more harm than good.

The better course was to inspire poetic sentiments. Aimé Martin relates that a mother, in similar circumstances, lent her son *The New Heloise*, “and to make himself worthy of love, the young man embarked on the path of virtue.” But Victor was incapable of dreaming about angels.

“What if we took him to visit the ladies?”

Pécuchet expressed his horror of prostitutes. Bouvard called him ridiculous, and even considered making a special trip to Le Havre.

“Don’t even think about it! They’d see us go in!”

“Well, then, buy him one of those belts!”

“But the truss maker will think it’s for me!” said Pécuchet.

The best thing would be to involve him in an active pleasure, like hunting. But that would entail the expense of a rifle and a dog. They preferred to tire him out with exercise, and began holding footraces in the countryside.

The boy got away from them. Even though they relayed each other, they couldn’t take any more, and in the evening were too exhausted to hold a newspaper.

While waiting for Victor to return, they chatted with passersby—and feeling the need to teach, they tried to tell them about hygiene, deploring the way they squandered water and fertilizer.

They reached the point of inspecting wet nurses, and became indignant over the diets of their babes. Some filled them with groats, which made them die of weakness. Others stuffed them with meat before the age of six months, and they keeled over from indigestion. Still others washed them with their own saliva. Every one of them handled the infants too roughly.

When they saw a crucified owl on a gate, they walked into the farm and said, "You're mistaken. Those animals live on rats and voles. In the stomach of one owl, they found nearly fifty caterpillar larvae."

The villagers remembered having seen them first as doctors, then in search of old furniture, then gathering stones, and answered, "Come off it! Don't try to pull another one over on us!"

In any case, their conviction soon crumbled. For sparrows purge vegetable gardens but eat up all the cherries. Owls devour insects, but also bats, which are beneficial; and while moles eat slugs, they also ruin the soil. One thing they knew for certain was that they had to do away with all the game animals, which were harmful to agriculture.

One evening as they were walking through the Faverges woods, they came to the game warden's shack. Sorel was at the side of the road, waving his arms amid three individuals.

The first was a cobbler named Dauphin, a short, thin fellow with a shifty face. The second was old Aubain, a deliveryman in the villages, who was wearing a ratty yellow coat and blue twill pants. The third, Eugène, a servant of Mr. Marescot's, could be recognized by his beard, which was styled like a magistrate's.

Sorel was showing them a hangman's noose in copper wire, which was attached to a silk thread held in place by a brick—the device commonly called a snare, which he had caught the cobbler setting up.

"You all saw it, didn't you?"

Eugène dipped his chin affirmatively, and old Aubain replied, "If you say so."

What enraged Sorel was the nerve of someone setting a trap right near his house, the knave obviously figuring that they'd never think to look there.

Dauphin put on a weepy face. "I was tromping on it! I was even trying to break it." They accused him all the same. He was a wretched fellow!

Without answering, Sorel took from his pocket a notebook and pen to write up a citation.

"Hold it!" said Pécuchet.

Bouvard added, "Let him go! He's a good man."

"Him? He's a poacher!"

"And so what if he is!" They launched into a defense of poaching. Everyone knew, first of all, that rabbits eat young shoots; hares destroy cereal crops. In fact, with the possible exception of the woodcock…

"Oh, leave me alone!" And the warden continued writing with teeth clenched.

"How stubborn he is!" Bouvard murmured.

"One more word from you and I'm calling the police."

"You are a vulgar little man," said Pécuchet.

"And you, little good-for-nothings!" retorted Sorel.

Bouvard, forgetting himself, called him a lout and a bully! And Eugène kept shouting for everyone to calm down, while old Aubain trembled three feet away standing on a small heap of gravel.

Excited by the loud voices, all the dogs in the pack came out of their kennels. Through the fence one could see their blazing eyes and black muzzles, and they ran back and forth, yelping infernally.

"You quit bothering me," their master cried, "or I swear I'll set them on your britches!"

The two friends took their leave, pleased to have defended progress and civilization.

The very next day, they received a summons to appear in civil court for having insulted a warden—and to be fined one hundred francs in interest and damages, "plus additional fines should the public prosecutor decide to pursue the case, in view of the infractions committed. Cost: six francs, seventy-five centimes. Tiercelin, bailiff."

Why the public prosecutor? Their heads were spinning. Then, calming down, they prepared their defense.

On the appointed day, Bouvard and Pécuchet arrived at the town hall one hour early. No one was there; straight-backed chairs and three armchairs surrounded a cloth-covered table. A niche had been carved into the wall to fit a stove, and a bust of the emperor on a small pedestal overlooked the room.

They climbed up to the attic, where there was a fire pump, several flags, and in a corner, on the floor, some other busts: the great Napoleon without his tiara, Louis XVIII with epaulettes and a tail coat, Charles X, recognizable by his drooping lip, Louis-Philippe with arched eyebrows and his hair in a pyramid. The slope of the ceiling brushed against his neck and all of them were covered in dust and flyspecks. The sight left Bouvard and Pécuchet demoralized. The whole idea of governments seemed pitiful to them as they returned to the main hall.

There they found Sorel and the policeman, one with his badge on his arm, the other in his kepi. A dozen or so people were standing around talking, charged with failure to keep the sidewalk clean, letting their dogs run loose, failure to carry a lantern, or having kept their café open during Mass.

Finally Coulon appeared, decked out in a black serge robe and a round toque with velvet trim. His recorder sat to his left, the mayor in his sash to the right. And they immediately called to the docket the matter of Sorel versus Bouvard and Pécuchet.

Louis-Martial-Eugène Lenepveur, manservant in Chavignolles (region of Calvados), took advantage of his status as witness to expound on a host of subjects completely immaterial to the case at hand.

Nicolas-Juste Aubain, workingman, was afraid of displeasing Sorel or of causing trouble for these gentlemen; he thought he'd heard some swear words but wasn't sure, being deaf and all.

The judge made him sit down. Then, addressing the warden: “Do you maintain your allegations?”

“Most definitely.”

Coulon then asked the two defendants what they had to say for themselves.

Bouvard maintained that he had never insulted Sorel, but rather, by defending Dauphin, had defended the interests of our countryside. He talked about feudal abuses and the ruinous hunts of the great lords.

“That’s irrelevant! The infraction!”

“Stop right there!” cried Pécuchet. “The words *infraction*, *crime*, and *offense* are meaningless. To use punishments as a means of classifying punishable acts is to stand on an arbitrary platform. You might as well tell citizens, ‘Don’t worry about the value of your actions. It is determined only by the punishments meted out by those in power.’ Moreover, the penal code seems to me an irrational document lacking in principles.”

“Be that as it may,” answered Coulon. And he began pronouncing his judgment: “Whereas…”

But Foureau, who was a public prosecutor, stood up. They had offended the warden in the exercise of his duties. If certain proprieties were not upheld, then all was lost. In short, may it please His Honor to apply the maximum sentence allowed by law.

It was ten francs, in the form of interest and damages for Sorel.

“Very well,” uttered Bouvard.

Coulon wasn’t finished: “I also sentence you to pay five francs in fines, for being guilty of the infraction cited by the public prosecutor.”

Pécuchet turned to the audience: “Fines are nothing to the rich man, but a disaster for the poor. As for me, I couldn’t care less!” And he seemed to be mocking the bench.

“I’m amazed,” said Coulon, “that gentlemen of your intelligence…”

“The law absolves you from having any,” retorted Pécuchet. “The justice of the peace is a lifetime appointment, whereas a justice in the Supreme Court is considered capable only until the age of seventy-five—and the judge of a lower court until the age of seventy.”

But at a sign from Foureau, Placquevent came forward. They protested.

“Ah, now if you had to pass an exam to get your job!”

“Or were appointed by the regional council.”

“Or by an administrative board!”

“From a serious list!”

Placquevent shoved them out—and they left, booed by the other defendants, who thought they’d be helping their own cases by this show of meanness.

To vent their indignation, that evening they went to Beljambe’s. His café was empty, as the notables generally left at around ten. They had lowered the lamp; the walls and counter could only be seen as if through a fog. A young woman emerged. It was Mélie.

She did not seem put out by them, and poured them two beers with a smile. Pécuchet, ill at ease, left the place soon afterward.

Bouvard returned alone, entertained several bourgeois with some witticisms at the mayor's expense, and began frequenting the place regularly.

Dauphin was acquitted six weeks later for lack of evidence. It was disgraceful! Now the same witnesses who had been believed against Bouvard and Pécuchet were considered untrustworthy.

And their fury knew no bounds when the registrar's office sent them a notice to pay the fine. Bouvard attacked the registrar as deleterious to property.

"You're very mistaken!" said the collector.

"Hardly! It's responsible for a good third of the public revenue! I'd like to see less oppressive tax laws, more equitable land assessment, reforms to the mortgage system, and the abolition of the Bank of France, which enjoys the right of usury."

Girbal was no match for them, fell sharply in popular opinion, and never came back.

Meanwhile, the innkeeper had taken a liking to Bouvard. He attracted customers; and while waiting for the regulars, he chatted familiarly with the barmaid.

He had some queer ideas about education. By the end of school, one should know how to treat the sick, understand scientific discoveries, and take an interest in the arts! The demands of his program caused friction with Petit; and he hurt the captain's feelings by claiming that soldiers, instead of wasting their time in maneuvers, would do better to grow vegetables.

When the topic turned to free trade, he brought Pécuchet along with him—and during that entire winter, the café was filled with furious faces, scornful gestures, insults, and shouts, plus some bangs on the table that made the beer glasses jump.

Langlois and the other merchants defended national commerce; Voisin, a mill owner, Oudot, manager of a rolling mill, and Mathieu, a goldsmith, national industry; the landowners and farmers, national agriculture—each one claiming privileges for himself to the detriment of the many. The speeches Bouvard and Pécuchet made were alarming.

Since they were accused of not knowing about "practicalities," of favoring immorality and the lowest common denominator, they devised these three recommendations: first, replace family names with a registration number; second, make a hierarchy of all Frenchmen—and in order to retain one's ranking, one would occasionally have to take a qualifying exam; third, do away with punishments and rewards, but maintain an individual record in every village that would be handed down to posterity. Their system was ignored.

They sent an article about it to the newspaper in Bayeux, a note about it to the prefect, a petition to the Chamber, a memorandum to the emperor. The newspaper did

not run their article; the prefect did not bother answering; the Chamber remained silent; and they waited in vain for a note from the Palace. What was keeping the emperor so busy? Courtesans, no doubt!

Foureau, on behalf of the sub-prefect, advised them to be more circumspect.

They didn't give a fig about the sub-prefect, the prefect, the prefecture councils, or even the Council of State! Administrative justice was a monstrosity, for the administration governs its functionaries very poorly, by means of favors and threats. In short, these two individuals became unpleasant to have around, and the notables demanded that Beljambe let them know they were no longer welcome.

Bouvard and Pécuchet then tried to draw attention to themselves with a project that would compel respect and dazzle their fellow citizens—and what they come up with was a plan to beautify Chavignolles.

Three-quarters of the houses would be demolished; in the middle of the town they'd build a monumental square, a hospice on the side nearest Falaise, slaughterhouses on the Caen road and, at Vaque Pass, a polychromatic Romanic church.

Pécuchet sketched a wash rendering in India ink, making sure to color the wood yellow, the fields green, and the buildings red. The depiction of an ideal Chavignolles pursued him in his dreams. He tossed and turned on his mattress. One night, it even woke Bouvard.

"Are you ill?"

Pécuchet stammered, "Haussmann won't let me sleep."

At around that time, they received a letter from Dumouchel asking about the cost of bathing on the Norman coast.

"To hell with him and his baths! As if we had time to write back!" And when they had procured a measuring chain, a graphometer, a water level, and a compass, they began making their surveys.

They barged into people's homes. The bourgeois were often surprised to find the two men planting surveying staffs in their yards. Bouvard and Pécuchet calmly announced what was to come. The public grew worried: what if the authorities decided to go along with their plan?

Sometimes they were rudely ejected. Then Victor scaled the walls and climbed onto rooftops to attach a signal, demonstrating a fair amount of good will and even a certain eagerness.

They were also happier with Victorine. When she ironed the laundry, she slid her iron over the board, humming in a gentle voice. She took a greater interest in housekeeping, made a skullcap for Bouvard, and her piqué stitch earned her the compliments of Romiche.

The latter was one of those itinerant tailors who go from farm to farm, mending people's clothes. They had him at the house for two weeks.

A hunchback with red eyes, he made up for his physical defects with a clownish sense of humor. While the owners were out, he entertained Marcel and Victorine by telling jokes, sticking his tongue out down to his chin, imitating the cuckoo, and performing ventriloquism. In the evening, to save the cost of an inn, he slept in the bakehouse.

Very early one morning, Bouvard, feeling in the mood to do a little work, went to fetch some wood shavings to light his fire.

What he saw made him freeze in his tracks.

Behind the ruins of the chest, on a pallet, Romiche and Victorine were lying next to each other. He had passed his arm under her waist, and his other hand, long as a monkey's paw, held her by the knee. His eyes were half-shut, his face still convulsed in a spasm of pleasure. She was smiling, stretched out on her back. The opening of her shift exposed her childish breast marbled with red spots by the hunchback's caresses. Her blond hair was in disorder, and the dawn cast a wan light on the pair of them.

At first, Bouvard had felt something like a blow to his chest. Then a sense of shame prevented him from taking another step, making another movement. Torturous thoughts filled his head: "So young! Ruined! Ruined!"

Then he went to awaken Pécuchet, and told him everything.

"Oh, that miserable wretch!"

"There's nothing we can do about it now! Settle down!"

And they spent a long time sighing back and forth, Bouvard with arms folded and not wearing a coat, Pécuchet at the edge of his bed, barefoot and in a cotton nightcap.

Romiche was supposed to leave that same day, having finished his work. They decided to pay him haughtily, without a word.

But Providence had it in for them. Marcel led them on tiptoe into Victor's room, and showed them a twenty-franc coin hidden in a drawer. The boy had asked him for change.

Where did it come from? From stealing, no doubt about it! While they were out on their engineering excursions. If they asked him for it, they would look like accomplices. Finally, having summoned Victor, they ordered him to open his drawer. The coin was gone.

And yet, they had touched it themselves only a short time before, and Marcel was incapable of lying. This incident so upset him that he'd forgotten to hand Bouvard a letter delivered that morning:

"Sir, Fearing that Mr. Pécuchet might be ill, I'm taking the liberty of asking for your help…" Who had written this? "Olympe Dumouchel, née Charpeau."

She and her husband were asking which resort location, Courseuilles, Langrune, or Ouistreham, was likely to be the least noisy. As well as the various means of transportation, the price of laundry, and a thousand other details.

The importunity of it put them in a rage against Dumouchel; then exhaustion plunged them into a still deeper discouragement. They recapitulated all the trouble they had gone to: so many lessons, precautions, torments.

"And to think," they said, "that once upon a time we wanted to make her a schoolmarm! And him, only recently, into a foreman!"

"If she's depraved, it's not the fault of her readings."

"I taught him the life of the bandit Cartouche to inspire honesty."

"Perhaps what they needed was a family, a mother's care."

"But I *was* one!" Bouvard objected.

"Alas!" answered Pécuchet. "But some people are simply lacking a moral sense, and there's nothing you can teach them."

"Ah, indeed—a lot of good education does."

As the orphans didn't know any trades, they would try to find them positions as household servants—and then, go with God! They'd have nothing more to do with them! And from then on, My Uncle and Good Friend made them take their meals in the kitchen.

But soon they grew bored again. Their minds needed some kind of occupation, a purpose to their existence. Besides, what does one failure prove? What hadn't worked with the children might be more successful with grown-ups. And they envisioned establishing a course for adults.

They needed to give a lecture to explain their ideas. The main room of the inn would be the perfect setting.

Beljambe, as a deputy, was afraid for his position and at first refused; then he changed his mind and sent the barmaid to tell them. Bouvard, overjoyed, kissed her on both cheeks.

The mayor was away and the other deputy, Marescot, was too absorbed in his legal work to notice; the lecture could therefore be held. The crier announced it for the following Sunday at three o'clock.

Only the day before did they think about what to wear.

Thank heaven, Pécuchet had kept an old formal suit, with a velvet collar, two white ties, and black gloves. Bouvard put on his blue frock coat, nankeen waistcoat, and buckskin shoes, and with great excitement they set out across the village.

Flaubert's manuscript ends here. Following are notes found among his papers, which give an outline of the book's conclusion.

Lecture.

The inn. Upstairs, two wooden galleries along the side walls with balconies jutting out—main building in the rear—café on the ground floor, dining room, billiards room —doors and windows open.

Crowds, notables, the common folk.

Bouvard: Our primary goal is to demonstrate the usefulness of our project—we believe our studies enable us to speak knowledgeably.

Pécuchet's speech—pedantic.

Stupidity of the government and administration. Too many taxes, two ways to economize: abolish funding for the army and for religion.

They accuse him of impiety.

On the contrary—but religion needs to be renovated.

Foureau suddenly appears and tries to disperse the assembly.

Bouvard makes the crowd laugh at the mayor's expense—his idiotic bonuses for owls. Objection: "If we should destroy animals that are harmful to plants, we should also destroy the livestock that eat grass."

Foureau withdraws.

Bouvard's speech—familiar.

Prejudices: celibacy of priests—futility of adultery—emancipation of women. Her earrings are the sign of her former servitude.—Male stud farms.

They are chided for the poor conduct of their pupils. And why did they adopt the children of a convict?

Theory of rehabilitation. They would gladly dine with Touache.

Foureau, back again, tries to get his revenge on Bouvard by reading a petition he'd sent to the town council requesting that they establish a brothel in Chavignolles—Robin's reasoning.

The meeting ends up in a tremendous uproar.

Returning home, they notice Foureau's servant galloping up the Falaise road.

They go to bed exhausted, unaware of all the resentment brewing against them—reasons why they would be hated by the priest, the doctor, the mayor, Marescot, the general populace, and everyone else.

The next day at lunch, they talk about the lecture.

Pécuchet takes a bleak view of mankind's future.

Modern man has been diminished and turned into a machine.

Final anarchy of the human race (Buchner, I.11).

Impossibility of peace (ibid.).

Barbarism through excess of individualism and the delirium of science.

Three hypotheses. Pantheistic radicalism will break all ties with the past—and an inhuman despotism will follow; 2nd, if theistic fundamentalism triumphs, and the liberalism with which humanity has been imbued since the Reformation succumbs, everything will be overturned; 3rd, if the upheavals that have taken place since '89 vacillate constantly between two possible outcomes, these oscillations will sweep us away under their own power.

There will no longer be any ideals, religion, morality.

America will conquer the earth.

The future of literature.

Widespread boorishness. Everywhere you look will be carousing laborers.

End of the world through the cessation of heat.

Bouvard has a rosier view of mankind's future.

Modern man is progressing.

Europe will be regenerated by Asia, since the law of history states that civilization moves from East to West. The role of China; the two populations will finally meld together.

Future inventions: ways of traveling. Balloon. Underwater boats with windows—in untroubled calm (since choppy seas are only at the surface), we will watch fish and landscapes parading by at the bottom of the ocean. Trained animals. Everything cultivated.

Future of literature (opposite of commercial literature).

Future sciences. Harness magnetic energy.

Paris, a winter garden; fruit orchards on the boulevards. The Seine filtered and warm—abundance of artificial precious stones—gold everywhere. Lighting of houses: they will store light, for certain bodies have that property, like sugar, the flesh of certain mollusks, and phosphorus. People will be expected to coat the sides of their houses with phosphorescent substance—and its radiance will light the streets.

Disappearance of evil through the disappearance of need. Philosophy will be religion.

Communion of all peoples, public celebrations.

We will go to the stars—and when the earth is used up, humanity will spread to other planets.

No sooner has he finished than the police enter.

The children's terror at seeing them—the effect of their dim memories.

Marcel's despair.

Bouvard and Pécuchet's concern: have they come to arrest Victor?

The police show a warrant. What's at issue is the lecture. They are accused of desecrating religion, disturbing the peace, seditious rhetoric, etc.

Sudden arrival of Mr. and Mme. Dumouchel, with their luggage. They have come to swim in the ocean. Dumouchel hasn't changed. His wife wears glasses and writes fables.—They are horrified.

The mayor, knowing the police are at Bouvard and Pécuchet's, also shows up, emboldened by their presence.

Gorgu, seeing that the authorities and public opinion are against them, decides to take advantage and brings Foureau. Supposing Bouvard the richer of the two, he accuses him of having debauched Mélie years before.

"Me? Never!" Pécuchet trembles. "And even of having placed her in a compromising situation." Bouvard is outraged. At the very least, he should provide for the child about to be born—for the girl is pregnant. This second accusation is based on Bouvard's familiarities with her at the café.

Little by little, the public invades the house.

Barberou, in the area on business, has learned of the situation while at the inn and suddenly appears. He thinks Bouvard is guilty, takes him aside, and urges him to give in, create a trust fund.

Arrival of the doctor, the count, Reine, Mme. Bordin, and Mme. Marescot beneath her umbrella. Other notables. The village children, outside the fence, throw stones into their garden. It is now well maintained and the townspeople are envious.

Foureau wants to drag Bouvard and Pécuchet to jail.

Barberou comes forward; then Marescot, the doctor, and the count also step in with an insulting pity.

Explain the arrest warrant: the sub-prefect, receiving Foureau's letter, has sent the warrant to give them a scare, with a note to Marescot and Faverges saying to let them go if they show any remorse.

Vaucorbeil (attracted by the noise) speaks for them: "You should haul them off to the lunatic asylum instead." This to explain his letter to the prefect at the end of the 2nd volume—for the prefect got wind of this note—and asked his advice: "Should they be locked up?"

Everything calms down. Bouvard agrees to provide for Mélie.

But the children cannot be left in their custody. They object—but since they never adopted the orphans legally, the mayor takes them back.

They show a revolting indifference. Bouvard and Pécuchet weep over it.

The Dumouchels leave.

And so everything has fallen apart in their hands.

They no longer have any interest in life.

A good idea nurtured by each one in secret. They hide it from one another. Now and again they smile when they think of it; then they tell each other about it simultaneously: to copy.

Building a two-sided desk. (Get in touch with the cabinetmaker. Gorgu, hearing of their invention, offers to make it for them. Recall the chest.)

Purchase of register books—and tools, pounce, scrapers, etc.

They set to it.

Eleven

THEIR COPY

They copy haphazardly, whatever falls into their hands, all the papers and manuscripts they come across, tobacco packets, old newspapers, lost letters, believing it all to be important and worth preserving. Notes from authors previously read. They have plenty to copy, for on the outskirts of town is a bankrupt paper mill, from which they buy masses of old papers.

But soon they feel the need to make some sort of classification…so they copy everything over in a large business register. The pleasure they feel in the physical act of copying.

Examples of every style, agricultural, medical, theological, classical, romantic, periphrasis.

Parallels: crimes of common people—of kings—benefits of religion, crimes of religion.

Howlers. Write the history of the world in howlers.

Dictionary of accepted ideas. Catalogue of fashionable ideas.

The manuscripts of Marescot's clerk = poetic passages.

Annotations at the foot of copies.

But they are often at pains to catalogue a fact in its correct place, have bouts of conscience. The difficulties increase the further they advance in their work.—They continue all the same.

—Marescot left Chavignolles for Le Havre, made some speculative investments, and is a notary in Paris.

—Mélie, who worked as a waitress for Beljambe, later married him—when Beljambe dies, she marries Gorgu and reigns over the inn.

Etc.

Twelve

Conclusion

One day, they find (in the old papers from the mill) the draft of a letter from Vaucorbeil to the Prefect.

The prefect has asked whether Bouvard and Pécuchet are dangerously insane. The doctor's letter is a confidential report explaining that they are just two harmless imbeciles. They recapitulate their actions and thoughts, which for the reader should be a critique of the novel.

"What shall we do with this?"—No time for reflection! Let's copy! The page must be filled, the "monument" completed. All things are equal: good and evil, beautiful and ugly, insignificant and characteristic. There is no truth in phenomena.

End with a view of our two heroes leaning over their desk, copying.

Dictionary of Accepted Ideas

Translator's note:

Fully conceived and largely completed as of 1850—that is, more than two decades before Flaubert began writing *Bouvard and Pécuchet*—the "Dictionary of Accepted Ideas" was both the kernel and an integral part of the novel as its author envisioned it. It was meant to be only part of a vast "compendium of stupidities," alongside the "Catalogue of Fashionable Ideas" (the draft outline of which is here presented in English for the first time) and scores of quotations, stylistic specimens ("medical," "religious," "great writer," and so on), and "howlers" derived from other people's works —the whole of which would have constituted the novels' second volume, equal in length to the ten written chapters. Only the "Dictionary" comes to us in relatively finished form, the rest existing only in the many pages of notes the author amassed before his death.

The "Dictionary" distills the novel's content and unseasonable sense of humor into a wide canvas of attitudes and opinions at once risible and deeply rooted (though Queneau and other French critics have taken a slightly different view). It has been pointed out that Flaubert, by setting his tale some thirty years before its composition, ensured that readers of his own time would be no more familiar with many of his references than we are today. The fact that, despite this, so much of the dictionary's humor and bite translate without difficulty into the modern American context is quite remarkable, and more than a little unsettling.

That said, one culture's cliché can be another's gibberish, and in some cases I've found it necessary to condense or slightly alter the original entry, or to delete it altogether, in the interests of intelligibility. Flaubert wrote that he meant the "Dictionary" to be "ironic and hilarious from start to finish"—or at least, quietly amusing—and any sacrifice I have made of strict accuracy has been in view of preserving this humor: may the proponents of literalness forgive me.

> *Vox populi, vox dei.*
> —The Wisdom of Nations
>
> One could wager that any public idea or generally accepted convention is foolishness, by simple virtue of the fact that it suits the majority.

—Chamfort, *Maxims*

A

ABELARD: No need to have any idea of his philosophy, or even to know the titles of his works. Allude discretely to his mutilation by Fulbert. Tomb of Heloise and Abelard: if someone tells you it's apocryphal, cry, "You are robbing me of my illusions!"

ABSALOM: If he had worn a wig, Job could never have killed him. Teasing nickname for a bald acquaintance.

ABSINTH: Ultra-violent poison: one glass and you're dead. Journalists drink it while writing their articles. Has killed more soldiers than the Bedouins.

ACADEMY (French): Scoff at it but try to join if possible.

ACCIDENT: Add "deplorable" or "unfortunate"—as if a misfortune could ever be cause for celebration.

ACHILLES: Add "fleet-footed": it makes people think you've read Homer.

ACTRESSES: The ruin of good sons. Are frightfully oversexed, participate in orgies, run through millions, wind up in the poorhouse. "I beg your pardon! Some of them are excellent wives and mothers."

ADMIRAL: Always brave. Swears only by "his shivering timbers."

ADOLESCENT: Never begin a scholastic prize-giving speech other than with "Young adolescents" (which is a pleonasm).

ADVERTISING: A source of wealth.

AGRICULTURE: Mother's milk from the Fatherland (which is a contradiction, but no matter). One should encourage it. Short of manpower.

AIR: Always beware of drafts. Invariably what's in the air never matches the temperature. If there's a chill in it, the air itself is warm, and vice versa.

ALABASTER: Used to describe the loveliest parts of a woman's body.

ALBION: Always preceded by "pale" or "perfidious." Napoleon came very close to conquering it. Praise it: England the free.

ALCIBIADES: Famous for his dog's tail. Type of debauchee. Frequented Aspasia.

ALCOHOLISM: Cause of all modern illnesses (v. *absinth* and *tobacco*).

AMBITION: Always preceded by "insane," unless it's noble.

AMBITIOUS: In the provinces, anyone who draws attention to himself. "Goodness, I'm not ambitious!"—meaning selfish or incapable.

AMERICA: Perfect example of injustice: it was Columbus who discovered it, but it is named for Amerigo Vespucci. If not for the discovery of America, we wouldn't have syphilis and Phylloxera. Praise it nonetheless, especially if one has never been there. Lecture people about self-government.

ANDROCLES: Cite Androcles's lion apropos of tamers.

ANGEL: Works well in love and in literature.
ANIMALS: Ah, if the animals could talk! Some of them are more intelligent than men.
ANTICHRIST: Voltaire, Renan…
ANTIQUES: Are always of recent manufacture.
ANTIQUITY, *and everything related to it*: Cliché, and boring as hell.
ANTS: A good example to show a spendthrift. Suggested the idea of savings banks.
APLOMB: Always preceded by "infernal" or "unshakable."
APRICOTS: We won't have any again this year.
ARCHIMEDES: When hearing his name, say, "Eureka!" or "Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum on which to place it, and I shall move the world." There is also Archimedes's screw, but one is not expected to know what it is.
ARCHITECTS: All morons. Always forget the staircase in houses.
ARCHITECTURE: There are only four types of architecture. Naturally we aren't counting the Egyptian, the Cyclopean, the Assyrian, the Indian, the Chinese, Gothic, Roman, etc.
ARISTOCRACY: Despise and envy it.
ARMY: Society's rampart.
ARSENIC: Can be found anywhere (remember Mme. Lafarge). There are certain populations that eat it regularly!
ART: Leads to the poorhouse. What good is it, since it is being replaced by mechanical processes that do the job better and faster?
ARTISTS: All jokers. Praise their disinterestedness [*Obs.*]. Be amazed that they dress like everyone else [*Obs.*]. Earn insane amounts, but spend it like water. Often invited to dinner in town. All women artists are sluts. What artists do can't be called work.
ASP: Animal known because of Cleopatra's basket of figs.
ASPHALT: Suppressed revolutions by preventing the building of barricades. All the same, is rather uncomfortable.
ASSASSIN: Always cowardly, even when he has been intrepid and daring. Less blameworthy than an arsonist.
ASTRONOMY: A fine science. Is of use only to the Navy. While on the subject, laugh at astrology.
ATHEIST: "A population of atheists could not survive."
ATTORNEY: More flattering than "lawyer."
AUTHOR: One should "know the great authors" no need to know their names.

B

BACCALAUREATE: Thunder against it.
BACHELOR PAD: Always messy, with women's baubles lying about. Reeks of cigarette

smoke. Extraordinary things must be lurking in it.

BACHELORS: All selfish and immoral. They should be taxed. Are destined for a lonely old age.

BACK: A clap on the back can give you tuberculosis.

BACKDROP (Theater): Is not painting. You just throw a can of paint haphazardly at the canvas, spread it around with a broom, and let distance and lighting create the illusion.

BACKROOM: Wax indignant when this word is spoken.

BAGNOLET: Town famous for its blind people.

BALDNESS: Always premature. Caused by youthful excesses or the hatching of great thoughts.

BALLOON: With balloons, we'll end up getting to the moon. We're a long way from being able to control them.

BANDITS: Always fierce.

BANKERS: All rich—Arabs, lynxes.

BANQUET: Festive and sincerely convivial occasions. One comes away with indelible memories, and never leaves without promising to see each other again next year. A wag should always refer to "the banquet of life," etc.

BARBER: Call him a "tonsorial artist" or "Figaro." Louis XI's barber. Used to bleed people.

BASILICA: Pompous synonym for church; always imposing.

BASQUES: The best runners.

BATTLE: Always blood-soaked. There are always two victors, the conqueror and the conquered.

BEAR: Usually named Martin. Tell the story of the idiot who, thinking he saw a watch in the bear pit, climbed down to retrieve it and was eaten alive.

BEARD: Sign of strength. Too much beard makes one's hair fall out. Useful for protecting neckties.

BEDROOM OF AN OLD CASTLE: Henry IV always slept there.

BEER: Shouldn't be drunk: it causes colds.

BEETHOVEN: Do not pronounce "Bee-thoven." Swoon whenever one of his works is played.

BELLOWS: Never have occasion to use it.

BELL TOWER (village): Makes the heart beat faster.

BELLY: Say "abdomen" when there are ladies present.

BIBLE: The oldest book in the world.

BILLIARDS: Noble game—indispensable in the country.

BIRD: Desiring to be one and saying with a sigh, "Ah, wings, wings…" is the sign of a poetic soul.

BLACK: Always followed by "as ebony" or preceded by "jet." What is jet?

BLONDES: Warmer than brunettes (v. *brunettes*).

BLOODLETTING: Have yourself bled in the spring.

BLUESTOCKING: Disparaging term to designate any woman who is interested in intellectual matters. Quote Molière in support: "When the compass of her mind she stretches," etc.

BOARDING SCHOOL: Use the English term if it's for young ladies.

BOAT: Only in Bayonne are they built well.

BODY: If we knew how our bodies were put together, we wouldn't dare budge.

BOIL: Sign of good health (v. *pimples*).

BONUSES (Holiday) Wax indignant at.

BOOK: No matter which one, always too long.

BOOTS: In hot weather, never fail to mention the boots of policemen or the shoes of mailmen (permissible only in the country, in the open). Boots are the only true footwear.

BREAD: One has no idea how much filth there is in it.

BREATH: Having bad breath makes one seem distinguished. Avoid allusions to its killing flies and remark that it comes from the stomach.

BRETONS: Good people, but stubborn.

BRONZE: Ancient metal.

BROOCH: Must always contain a lock of hair or a photograph.

BROTH: Is hearty. Impossible to distinguish from consommé.

BRUNETTES: Warmer than blondes (v. *blondes*).

BUDDHISM: "Pseudo religion of India" (definition from Bouillet's Dictionary, 1st edition).

BUDGET: Never balanced.

BUFFON: Put on lace cuffs before writing.

BULL: Father of the calf. The ox is just its uncle.

BULLSHIT: Use this word only for swearing, and even then! (v. *doctor*).

BURIAL: Too often premature. Tell stories of corpses that had eaten their own arm to appease their hunger.

BUSINESS AFFAIRS: Come before everything. The most important thing in life. A woman should avoid talking about hers. The be-all and end-all.

BUTCHERS: Are terrible in times of revolution.

C

CABINETMAKER: Laborer who mainly works with mahogany.

CABLE: People have no idea how strong a cable is: stronger than iron.

CACHET: Always preceded by "a certain."

CALLING: Art, medicine, etc., are callings.

CAMEL: Has two humps and the dromedary has one. Or else, the camel has one hump and the dromedary has two. It gets confusing.

CANDOR: Always adorable. One is either filled with it or has none at all.

CANNONADE: Changes the weather.

CANNONBALL: The wind from one can make you blind.

CARRIAGE: Easier to rent than to own—this way, one doesn't have to bother with servants or with perpetually sick horses.

CARTHUSIAN MONKS: Spend their time making chartreuse, digging their graves, and saying, "Brothers, we must all die."

CARTRIDGE POUCH: Case for a French marshal's baton.

CASTLE: Has always withstood a siege under Philip Augustus.

CAT: Cats are treacherous. Call them "tigers of the salon" (fashionable). Cut off their tails to prevent vertigo.

CATHOLICISM: Has had a very beneficial influence on the arts.

CAVALRY: Nobler than the infantry.

CAVES: The standard hideout of bandits. Are always full of snakes.

CEDAR: The one in the Botanical Gardens was brought back in a hat.

CELEBRITY: Concern yourself with the slightest detail of celebrities' private lives, then denigrate them.

CELL (Prison): Always horrible. The straw is always damp. We have yet to find a pleasant one.

CENSORSHIP: Useful, no matter what they say.

CERUMEN: "Human wax." Avoid removing it because it keeps insects from crawling into the ear cavities.

CHAMBER: Works well in official speeches: "Gentlemen, in this hallowed chamber…"

CHAMBERMAIDS: Prettier than their mistresses. Know all their secrets and betray them. Always dishonored by the young man of the house.

CHAMPAGNE: A standard feature of ceremonial dinners. Affect to despise it, saying, "It's not really a wine." Causes tipsiness in common people. "Russia consumes more of it than France!" Helped spread French ideas throughout Europe. Under the Regency, they did nothing but drink it.

CHATEAUBRIAND: Mainly known for the steak that bears his name.

CHEESE: Quote Brillat-Savarin's aphorism: "A meal without cheese is like a beauty with only one eye."

CHESS (Game of): Reflection of military tactics. All the great captains were excellent players. Too serious to be a game, too frivolous to be a science.

CHEST-PLATE: Never use this expression with reference to a woman's breasts.

CHIAROSCURO: We don't know what this is.

CHILBLAIN: Sign of good health. Has just warmed up, after being cold.

CHILDREN: Affect a lyrical tenderness toward them—when people are around.
CHIMNEY: Smoke is always rising from one. Topic of discussion, with regard to heating.
CHIMNEY SWEEP: Wintertime's swallow.
CHINA: More fashionable than porcelain.
CHIVALRY: It's dead.
CHOLERA: Melons give you cholera. The cure is to drink lots of tea with rum.
CHRISTIANITY: Freed the slaves.
CHRISTMAS DINNER: The sausage makes the meal.
CIDER: Ruins the teeth.
CIGARS: Those of the Tobacco Authority are "all disgusting." The only good kinds are contraband.
CLARINET: Playing it makes you blind. Ex.: all blind people play the clarinet.
CLASSICS (The): One is supposed to know them.
CLEANSING: Said only when speaking of the foot-washing ceremony.
CLOAK: Always gray for romantic escapades.
CLOWN: Was double-jointed as a child.
CLUB: One should always belong to a political club. The exasperation of conservatives. Argument and confusion about the derivation of the word.
COBBLER: *Ne sutor ultra crepidam*.
COFFEE: Sharpens the wits. Only the kind that comes from Le Havre is good. At a fancy dinner, should be drunk standing up. Take it without sugar—very smart, and makes you look like you've lived in the Far East.
COGNAC: Very dangerous. Excellent for a variety of illnesses. A nice glass of cognac never did any harm. Taken on an empty stomach, kills intestinal worms.
COITUS, COPULATION: Words to be avoided. Say, "They had relations…"
COLD: Healthier than heat.
COLONIES (Our): Wax melancholic when the subject comes up.
COMB: Makes the hair fall out.
COMEDY: In verse, is no longer suited to our times. One should nonetheless respect high comedy. *Castigat ridendo mores.*
COMETS: Laugh at populations that were afraid of them.
COMFORT: Precious modern discovery.
COMMERCE: Debate which is nobler, commerce or industry.
COMMUNION: First Communion is the most beautiful day of one's life.
COMPASS: Having a good internal one helps you walk straight.
COMPETITION: The soul of commerce.
COMPOSITION: In school, is a proof of industriousness, as being good in Latin shows intelligence. But in the real world, one must make fun of those who were good at composition.

COMPOSURE: Looks well-bred, and besides it makes you seem English. Always preceded by "unflappable."

CONCERT: Perfectly respectable pastime.

CONCESSIONS: Never make any. They were Louis XVI's downfall.

CONCILIATION: Always preach it, even when the opposing sides are intractable.

CONCISION: A language no one speaks anymore.

CONCUPISCENCE: A priest's word to signify carnal desire.

CONFECTIONER: All the citizens of Rouen are confectioners.

CONGRATULATIONS: Always sincere, hearty, warm, etc.

CONSERVATIVE: Politician with a large belly. "Conservative with blinders on!" "Quite right, sir—these blinders are my guardrails."

CONSERVATORY: A subscription to the Conservatory is indispensable.

CONSPIRATOR: Conspirators always have a habit of putting their names on a list.

CONSTIPATION: Has an influence on political convictions. All men of letters are constipated.

CONTRALTO: We don't know what this is.

CONVERSATION: Politics and religion should be avoided.

CONVICTS: Always have sinister faces. All very capable with their hands. In prison, there are men of genius.

COOKING: In restaurants: always constipating. At home: always hearty. In the South: too spicy or oily.

COPAIBA BALSAM: Pretend not to know what it's for.

CORN (Foot): Predicts changes in weather better than a barometer. Removing one carelessly can be very dangerous: cite examples of horrible accidents.

CORSET: Prevents having children.

COSSACKS: Eat tallow.

COTTON: Is mainly useful for the ears.

COUNCILMEN (Town): Thunder against them apropos of street paving. "What are our councilmen *thinking* of?"

COUNTENANCE: A pleasing countenance is the surest passport.

COUNTERFEITERS: Always work in basements.

COUNTRY: Country folk are better than city folk. Envy them. In the country, everything is allowed—shoddy dress, pranks, etc.

COUSIN: Advise husbands to beware of the wife's cousin.

CRAYFISH: Walks backward. Always call reactionaries "crayfish."

CREOLE: Spends his life in a hammock.

CRIMINAL: Always nefarious.

CRITIC: Always eminent. Is thought to know everything, be aware of everything, have read everything and seen everything. Call the ones you don't like "Aristarchus" or "eunuch."

CROCODILE: Imitates children's wails to attract humans.
CROSSBOW: Excellent opportunity to bring up the story of William Tell.
CRUCIFIX: Looks good in an alcove and on the guillotine.
CRUSADES: Were a boon to Venetian commerce.
CUCKOLD: Every woman should make her husband a cuckold.
CUDGEL: More fearsome than the sword.
CUJAS: Inseparable from Barthole. No one knows what they wrote. Regardless: say to anyone studying law, "You're too absorbed in Cujas and Barthole."
CURACAO: The best is from Holland, because Curacao is in the Antilles.
CURL, CURLING: Not suitable for men.
CUSTOMS: One should rebel against it and defraud it (v. *taxes*).
CUT-RATE: Good name for a shop: inspires confidence.
CYPRESS: Grows only in cemeteries.
CZAR: Pronounce "tsar," and occasionally "autocrat."

D

DAGUERREOTYPE: Will replace painting (v. *photography*).
DAMASCUS: The only place where they know how to make swords. Every good blade comes from Damascus.
DAMP: The cause of all illnesses.
DANCE: People no longer dance, they march.
DANCING GIRL: This phrase takes the imagination quite far. All Oriental women are dancing girls (v. *odalisque*).
DANTON: "We must dare, and dare again, and go on daring!"
DARWIN: The fellow who said we descended from apes.
DAY: The Gentleman has his days: for shaving, taking medicine, etc. The Lady has hers as well, which she calls "critical" at certain times of the month.
DEBAUCHERY: Cause of all illnesses in bachelors.
DECORATION *from the Legion of Honor*: Scoff at them, but covet them all the same. When you are awarded one, always say you didn't ask for it.
DEFEAT: Is met with—and is so utter that no one is left to tell the tale.
DEFLORATION (Right of): Do not believe it.
DEFRAUD: Defrauding the tax department is not cheating, but a proof of spirit and political independence.
DEICIDE: Be outraged by, even though the crime is pretty rare.
DELIVERY (birth): Word to avoid; replace it with *event*. "When are you expecting the event?"
DEMOSTHENES: Never gave a speech without a pebble in his mouth.

DENTISTS: All liars. Use quack remedies. Are also taken for chiropodists. Call themselves surgeons the way opticians call themselves engineers.

DENTURES: Third set of teeth. Be careful not to swallow them in your sleep.

DEPUTY: To be elected one is the height of glory! Thunder against the Chamber of Deputies. Too many blowhards in the Chamber. They do nothing.

DERBY: A racing term. Very chic.

DESCARTES: "Cogito, ergo sum."

DESERT: Dates come from there.

DESSERT: Virtuous individuals refuse it: "Oh, no! No pastry. I never eat dessert!"

DEVOTION: Complain that others are lacking in it. "In this regard, we can't hold a candle to the dog!"

DIAMOND: They'll end up manufacturing them—and to think they're only coal. If you found one in its natural state, you wouldn't bother to pick it up.

DIANA: Goddess of the chas(t)e.

DICTIONARY: Scoff at it—is only for ignoramuses. Rhyming dictionary: Use one? Disgraceful!

DIDEROT: Always followed by "and d'Alembert."

DILETTANTE: Rich man, subscribes to the Opera.

DIMPLES: One should always tell a pretty girl that she has suitors nestled in her dimples.

DINNER: Once people dined at noon, but now they dine at impossible hours. What our forefathers called "dinner" is our lunch—and our lunch was their dinner. Dining that late is not called dinner, but "supper"!

DIOGENES: "I am looking for an honest man" "Stand out of my light."

DIPLOMA: Sign of knowledge. Doesn't prove a thing.

DIPLOMACY: A distinguished career, but fraught with difficulties and shrouded in mystery. Is suitable only for aristocrats. A difficult occupation to define, but above the common. A diplomat is always a shrewd observer of men.

DIRECTORY (The): The shame of those times! "In those days, honor had taken refuge in the armies." In Paris, the women went about stark naked.

DISSECTION: An insult to the majesty of death.

DIVA: All female singers should be called "diva."

DIVORCE: If Napoleon hadn't divorced, he would still be on the throne.

DJINN: Name of an Oriental dance.

DOCTOR: Always preceded by "the good." In familiar conversation among men: "Oh, bullshit, doctor!" Is a miracle worker when he has your confidence, a jackass when you've fallen out. All doctors are materialists. "You can't find the soul with a scalpel."

DOCTRINARIANS: Despise them. Why? No idea.

DOCUMENT: Always of the utmost importance.

DOG: Especially created to save its master's life. Man's best friend.
DOGE: Married the sea. We know of only one: Marino Faliero.
DOLMEN: Has to do with the ancient French. Stone used for druid sacrifices. They exist only in Brittany. Nothing more is known about them.
DOLPHIN: Carries its young on its back.
DOME: Architectural tour de force. Be amazed that it can stay up by itself. Cite two, the one on the Invalides and the one on Saint Peter's in Rome.
DOMICILE: Always inviolable. Despite this, the Courts and the Police enter whenever they please. Home, sweet home. I return to my lair.
DOMINOS: One's game improves as one gets tipsier.
DORMITORIES: Always spacious and well ventilated. Better than bedrooms, for the students' morals.
DOUBT: Worse than denial.
DRAWING (Art of): Is composed of three things: line, shading, and fine shading, as well as the finishing stroke, but only the master can provide the finishing stroke (Christophe).
DRUNK: Always preceded by "blind."
DUCKS: All come from Rouen.
DUEL: Thunder against it. Is not a proof of courage. Prestige of the man who has fought a duel.
DUNGEON: Inspires morbid thoughts.
DUPE: Better to be a rogue than a dupe.
DUPUYTREN: Famous for his ointment and his museum.
DUTIES: Some people have them toward you, but you do not have any toward them.
DWARF: Tell the story of General Tom Thumb and, if you have shaken his hand, announce it with pride.

E

EARLY RISER: To be one is a proof of morality. The man who goes to bed at 4 in the morning and gets up at 8 is lazy, but the man who goes to bed at 9 in the evening and goes out at 5 the next morning is active.
EARTH: Say "the four corners of the earth," even though it's round.
ECHO: Cite those of the Pantheon and the bridge at Neuilly.
ECLECTICISM: Thunder against it, as being an immoral philosophy.
ECONOMIC: Always followed by "order." Leads to fortune. Cite the story of Laffitte picking up a pin in the courtyard of the banker Perrégaux.
ECONOMY (Political): A science without guts.
EDUCATION: Let people believe that yours is extensive. Commoners don't need any to earn

a living.

EGG: Departure point for a philosophical disquisition on the genesis of living creatures.

EGOTISM: Complain of it in others and not notice one's own.

ELEPHANTS: Are distinguished by their memory, and adore the sun.

EMIR: Said only when speaking of Abd El-Kader.

EMPIRE: "The Empire means peace" (Napoleon III).

EMPRESSES: All beautiful.

ENAMEL: Its secret has been lost.

ENCYCLOPEDIA (The): Laugh at it pityingly as an outdated work, and even thunder against it.

ENGINEER: The best career for a young man. Knows all the sciences.

ENGLISHMEN: All rich.

ENGLISHWOMEN: Be amazed that they have such lovely children.

ENTHUSIASM: Can only be inspired by the return of the Emperor's ashes. Always impossible to describe, yet the newspaper devotes two full columns to it.

EPACT, GOLDEN NUMBER, DOMINICAL LETTER: On calendars. We do not know what these are.

EPICURUS: Despise him.

EPISTOLARY: A stylistic genre, reserved exclusively for women.

ERA (ours): Thunder against it. Complain that it isn't poetic. Call it a period of transition or decadence.

ERASER (Elastic): Made from horse scrotum.

ERECTION: Said only with reference to monuments.

EROSTRATUS: To be brought up in any conversation about fires set during the Commune.

ERROR: "It's worse than a crime, it's an error" (Talleyrand). "There is no longer a single error left to commit" (Thiers). These two sentences must be articulated with profundity.

ERUDITION: Despise it as the mark of a narrow mind.

ESPLANADE: Is seen only at the Invalides.

ÉTAGÈRE: Indispensable in a pretty woman's home.

ETIQUETTE: Confers prestige. Fires the imagination of the masses.

ETRUSCAN: All ancient vases are Etruscan.

ETYMOLOGY: Nothing could be easier, with some Latin and a little thought.

EUNUCH: Never has children. Fulminate against the castrati of the Sistine Chapel.

EVACUATIONS: Evacuations are often copious and always of a bad nature.

EVENING OUT *with the boys*: Requires oysters, white wine, and ribaldry.

EVENINGS: In the country they are spent morally.

EXASPERATION: Constantly at its limit.

EXCEPTION: Say that they prove the rule. Don't venture to explain how.

EXECUTIONER: Office passed down from father to son.

EXECUTIONS (Capital): Complain about women who go to see them.
EXERCISE: Safeguards against all illnesses. Always recommend it.
EXHAUSTION: Always premature.
EXHIBITION: Topic of frenzied excitement in the 19th century.
EXPIRE: Used only with reference to newspaper subscriptions.
EXPUNGE: Used only with reference to poverty.
EXTIRPATE: Verb used only for heresies and foot corns.

F

FACE: Mirror of the soul. In which case, some people's souls are mighty ugly.
FACTORY: Dangerous to live near.
FAITHFUL: Inseparable from "friend" and "dog." Never fail to quote these lines: "A faithful friend is a strong defense, and he that hath found such a one hath found a treasure," etc.
FANFARE: Always loud.
FAREWELLS: Put a quiver in one's voice when speaking of Fontainebleau's farewells.
FARM: When visiting a farm, eat only whole grain bread and drink only milk. If you also have eggs, exclaim, "Goodness, they're so fresh! No chance of finding any like these in town."
FARMERS: Always taking it easy.
FASTING: At bottom, just a hygienic measure.
FAT: Fat people don't need to learn to swim. Are the despair of executioners because they make the job so difficult. Example: Mme. Du Barry.
FATALITY: Exclusively romantic word.
FAVOR: One is doing children a favor by spanking them; animals, by beating them; servants, by firing them; criminals, by punishing them.
FEAR: Gives one wings.
FELICITY: Always perfect. If your housekeeper is named Felicity, then she is perfect.
FEMALE: Unlike humans, female animals are less attractive than the males. E.g., pheasant, rooster, lion, etc.
FENCING: Fencing instructors know secret thrusts.
FETUS: Any anatomical part preserved in wine spirits.
FEUDALISM: Without any clear idea of what it is, thunder against it.
FEVER: Proof of vigorous blood. Is caused by prunes, melon, April sun, etc.
FEZ: Indispensable to the man of letters. Lends dignity to the face.
FIG LEAF: Emblem of virility in sculpture.
FIGARO (The Marriage of): Yet another cause of the Revolution!
FINGER: God pokes his fingers everywhere.

FINGER BOWL: Sign of wealth in a household.

FIRE: Purifies everything. When you hear someone shout "Fire!" the first thing to do is lose your wits.

FIRING SQUAD: Nobler than the guillotine. Joy of the individual who is granted this favor.

FIST: To rule France, one must have an iron fist.

FLAG (National): Seeing it makes the heart beat faster.

FLAGRANTE DELICTO: Use in Latin. Is applied only to cases of adultery.

FLAMINGO: Bird, so named because it is Flemish.

FLATTERER: Never miss an occasion to quote, "'Tis hard to find a man of great estate, that can distinguish flatterers from friends." Or else, "Every flatterer lives at the expense of him who listens to him."

FLIES: *Puer abige muscas.*

FLOOD VICTIMS: Always along the Loire.

FOOD: Always hearty and plentiful in boarding schools.

FOREHEAD: High and bald is an indicator of genius.

FOREIGN: Fascination with everything that comes from abroad is proof of a liberal mind. Denigration of anything that isn't French is proof of patriotism.

FORK: Should always be made of silver: it's less dangerous. Use it with the left hand, which is more comfortable and more distinguished.

FORNARINA: She was a beautiful woman. That's all you need to know about her.

FORTUNE: *Audaces fortuna juvat.* The rich are lucky, they have fortunes! When someone speaks to you of a great fortune, never fail to say, "Yes, but is it quite secure?"

FOSSIL: Proof of the Flood. Tasteful witticism, when applied to an academician.

FOUNDATION: News items are always lacking any.

FRANCOPHOBE: Use this term when speaking of German columnists.

FREE TRADE: The bane of commerce.

FREEDOM: O freedom! How many crimes have been committed in thy name! We have all the ones we need. Freedom is not license (conservative's phrase).

FREEMASONRY: Yet another cause of the Revolution! The initiation rites are terrible—some have died from them. Cause of arguments in households. The clergy holds it in poor esteem. Whatever could their secret be?

FRENCH: The best people in the universe. "There is simply one more Frenchman," said the Count d'Artois. How proud one feels to be French when one gazes on the Vendome column!

FRENCH FURY: Always say "*furia francese.*"

FRESCO: No one makes them anymore.

FRICASSEE: Only prepared well in the country. Rabbit fricassee is always made with cat.

FROG: Lives inside rocks.

FRONTISPIECE: Great men look good on them.

FUGUE: We don't know quite what they are, but the fact is that they're very difficult, and very boring.

FULMINATE: Pretty verb.

FUNCTIONARY: Inspires respect, whatever function he fills.

FUNDAMENTS OF SOCIETY: I.e., property, family, religion, respect for authority. Defend them angrily if they're attacked.

FUNDS (Secret): Incalculable sums with which ministers buy consciences. Wax indignant over.

FUNERAL: About the deceased: "And to think that we dined together no more than a week ago!" Called "obsequies" for a general, "entombment" for a philosopher.

FUR: Sign of wealth.

FURNITURE: Have every fear for one's furniture.

FURUNCLE: V. *pimples.*

G

GAMBLING: Rail against this fatal passion.

GAME (meat): Is good only when slightly off.

GARDENS (English): More natural than French gardens.

GARLIC: Kills intestinal worms and leaves one ready for bouts of love. They rubbed Henry IV's lips with at as he came into the world.

GARRET: A wonderful place to be when one is twenty!

GARTER: Must always be worn above the knee for women of high society, below for women of the people. A woman should never neglect this vestimentary detail—there are so many brazen individuals in the world.

GENERAL: Is always brave. Usually holds a profession unrelated to his rank, such as ambassador, town councilman, or head of government.

GENERATION (Spontaneous): A socialistic idea.

GENIUS: Useless to admire it, it's "a neurosis"!

GENTLEMAN: There aren't any left.

GEOMETRY: "Let no one unversed in geometry enter here."

GERMANS: A nation of dreamers [*Obs.*]. But what military organization! No wonder they beat us, we weren't ready!

GIAOUR: Fierce expression of unknown meaning, but it has something to do with the Orient.

GIBBERISH: A foreigner's way of speaking. Always laugh at a foreigner who speaks your language poorly.

GIFT: It's not the value that determines its worth, or else it's not the worth that determines its value. The gift is unimportant, it's the thought that counts.

GIRAFFE: A polite word so as not to call a woman a cow.
GIRONDINS: To pity more than to blame.
GLOBE: Modest word to designate a woman's breasts. "Permit me to kiss your adorable globes."
GLORIA: A *Gloria* must always be accompanied by its *consolation*.
GLORY: Is but a wisp of smoke.
GLOVES: Give one that proper look.
GOBELINS TAPESTRY: Remarkable piece of work, takes fifty years to complete. When seeing one, exclaim, "It's more beautiful than painting! The craftsman has no idea what he's done!"
GOD: Voltaire himself said, "If God didn't exist, we would have to invent him."
GODDAM: "The essence of the English language," said Beaumarchais. Snicker patronizingly.
GODFATHER: Always the godchild's true father.
GOG: Always followed by Magog.
GOLDSMITH: Always call him Mr. Josse.
GOSPELS: Divine, sublime books, etc.
GOTHIC: Architectural style that suits religion better than the others.
GOURMET: Always preceded by "fine."
GOVERNESSES: Are all from excellent families that have fallen on hard times. Dangerous in households, seduce the husband.
GRAMMAR: Teach it to children from their earliest years as being something clear and easy.
GRAMMARIANS: All pedants.
GRATITUDE: Doesn't need to be expressed.
GREEK: Anything unintelligible.
GREETINGS: Always cordial.
GRISETTES: There aren't any left. This should be said with the downcast air of a hunter complaining that there is no more game.
GROG: Not socially acceptable.
GROTTOES WITH STALACTITES: A famous celebration (ball or banquet) was held inside one, given by a prominent figure. One sees things "that look like organ pipes." Mass was said in them during the Revolution.
GROUPING: Appropriate for mantelpieces and politics.
GUARD: The guard shall not lay down its arms! Eight words to replace five letters.
GUERRILLA: Does more damage to the enemy than the regular army.
GUESTS: To be held up as examples for your children.
GULF STREAM: Famous, recently discovered city in Norway.
GUNFIRE: The only way to shut Parisians up.
GYMNASIUM: Branch of the Comédie Française.

GYMNASTICS: One can never do enough. Wears children out.

H

HABIT: The ones acquired while a student are generally bad.
HACK: Journalist. When one adds "lowlife," it's the pits of disdain.
HAIDUK: Confuse it with eunuch.
HALBERD: In Switzerland, all the men carry halberds.
HAM: Always from Mayence. Beware of it, because of trichina.
HAMLET: Touching noun. Works well in poetry.
HAMMOCK: Suitable for Creoles. Indispensable in a garden. Convince oneself that it is more comfortable than a bed.
HAND: To have a fine hand means to write well.
HANDKERCHIEF: It is socially correct to blow your nose in one.
HANDWRITING: Fine handwriting opens every door. When indecipherable: indicator of science, such as doctors' prescriptions.
HARD: Invariably add "as iron." One can also say "hard as a rock," but it's less energetic.
HARE: Sleeps with its eyes open.
HAREM: Always compare a rooster among hens to a sultan in his harem. Every schoolboy's dream.
HARP: Produces celestial harmonies. In engravings, is played only on ruins or at the edge of a waterfall. Shows off the arm and hand to advantage.
HASHISH: Not to be confused with beef hash, which produces no voluptuous sensation whatsoever.
HAT: Complain about the shape of.
HEALTH: Too much health is a cause of illness.
HEAT: Always unbearable! Never drink when it's hot out.
HEMICYCLE: Know of none except the one at the Beaux-Arts.
HEMORRHOIDS: Come from sitting on stoves and stone benches. Saint Fiacre's Disease. Hemorrhoids are a sign of good health, therefore one must not drain them.
HENRY III, HENRY IV: Apropos these kings, never fail to say, "All the Henrys were unfortunate."
HERCULES: Name for any strong man. Always come from the North.
HERMAPHRODITE: Arouses unwholesome curiosity. Try to see one.
HERNIA: Everybody has one without knowing it.
HERRING: The wealth of Holland.
HIATUS: Do not tolerate it.
HICCUPS: The cure is a clap on the back or a sudden fright.
HIEROGLYPHICS: Ancient language of the Egyptians, invented by priests to conceal their

guilty secrets. And to think there are people who understand them! When all is said and done, they might be just a hoax.

HIPPOCRATES: One should always quote him in Latin, because he wrote in Greek, except in this phrase: "Hippocrates says yes, but Galen says no."

HIPPOLYTUS: The death of Hippolytus is the most beautiful recital passage that can be assigned. Everyone should learn it by heart.

HOMER: Never existed. Famous for his way of laughing.

HOMO: Say "Ecce homo!" when the person one is expecting enters.

HONOR: When speaking of it, quote this phrase: "Honor is like a steep, smooth embankment;/Once fallen one cannot climb back up." Always care deeply about one's own, and not a whit about that of others.

HORIZONS: Find natural ones beautiful and political ones somber.

HORN (Hunting): Makes a good effect in the woods, and on water in the evening.

HORROR: "Horrors!" with regard to lewd expressions. One can do these things, but not say them. "It was in the horror of blackest night."

HORSE: If it knew its own strength, would not let itself be treated that way. Horse meat: a good pamphlet topic for a man looking to be taken seriously. Race horse: despise it! What good does it serve?

HORSEBACK RIDING: Good exercise for losing weight. Example: all cavalry soldiers are thin. Good exercise for gaining weight. Example: all cavalry officers are potbellied.

HOSPITALITY: Must always be Scottish. Quote these verses: "In Scotland, hospitality when sought/May be given but never bought."

HOSPODAR: Works well in a sentence about "Oriental matters."

HOSTILITIES: Hostilities are like oysters, they have to be "opened." It seems all that's left is to sit at table.

HOTELS: Are good only in Switzerland.

HOUSEHOLD: Always speak of it with respect.

HUGO (Victor): Was wrong to get involved in politics.

HUNCHBACKS: Are very witty. Much sought after by lustful women.

HUNT: Excellent sport that one should affect to adore. Part of the pomp of Sovereigns. Sends magistrates into raptures.

HUSSAR: Pronounce "hu-*zar*." Always preceded by "gallant" or "dashing." Appeals to the ladies. Never fail to quote, "She espied her young gallant Hussar…"

HYDRA *of anarchy, socialism, or any other system that frightens people*: Try to conquer it.

HYDROTHERAPY: Cure and cause of every illness.

HYGIENE: Must always be maintained. Prevents illnesses, except when it causes them.

HYPNOTISM: Excellent topic of conversation, and helps you meet women.

HYPOTHESIS: Often risky, always bold.

HYSTERIA: Confuse it with nymphomania.

I

ICE CREAM: Eating it is dangerous.
ICE CREAM MAKERS: All Neapolitan.
IDEAL: Utterly useless.
IDEOLOGUES: All journalists are.
IDOLATERS: Are cannibals.
ILIAD: Always followed by *Odyssey*.
ILLEGIBLE: What a doctor's prescription should be. Same for signatures: this shows that one is inundated with correspondence.
ILLUSIONS: Claim to have many. Lament having lost them.
IMAGES: Poetry always contains too many of them.
IMAGINATION: Always vivid. Guard against it. When one has none, denigrate it in others. To write novels, all you need is a little imagination.
IMBECILES: Those who don't think like you.
IMMIGRANTS: Earn their living by giving guitar lessons and making salad.
IMMORALITY: When said well, this word enhances the person using it.
IMPERIALISTS: All honest, refined, peaceful, distinguished.
IMPIETY: Thunder against it.
IMPORTS: A perpetual drain on trade.
IMPRESARIO: Artist's word that means director. Always preceded by "able."
INAUGURATION: Cause for joy.
INCAPACITY: Always notorious. The more incapable one is, the more ambitious one must be.
INCOGNITO: The guise in which princes travel.
INCRUSTATION: Said only with reference to mother-of-pearl.
INDOLENCE: The result of warm climates.
INDUSTRY: V. *commerce*.
INFANTICIDE: Only committed among the common folk.
INFINITESIMAL: No one knows what it is, but it's related to homeopathy.
INFORMANTS: Always with the police.
INKWELL: Is given as a gift to doctors.
INNATE IDEAS: Scoff at them.
INNOCENCE: Impassiveness proves it.
INNOVATION: Always dangerous.
INQUISITION: Its crimes have been greatly exaggerated.
INSCRIPTION: Always cuneiform.
INSPIRATION (Poetic): Things that provoke it: the sight of the ocean, love, women, etc.
INSTINCT: Makes up for intelligence.

INSTITUTE (French): The members of the French Institute are all old men who wear green taffeta eyeshades.
INSTRUMENT: The instruments used to commit a crime are always blunt, unless they're sharp.
INSULT: Must always be washed away with blood.
INSURRECTION: "Man's most sacred duty" (Blanqui).
INTEGRITY: Especially characteristic of magistrates.
INTERMISSION: Always too long.
INTOXICATION: Always preceded by "mad."
INTRIGUE: The doorway to anything.
INTRODUCTION: Obscene word.
INVASION: Leaves people in tears.
INVENTORS: All die in the poorhouse—and someone else profits from their discovery, which isn't fair.
INVOICE: Always too high.
ITALIANS: All musical. All treacherous.
ITALY: Should be seen immediately after marriage. Gives rise to much disappointment, is not as beautiful as they say.
IVORY: Used only with regard to teeth.

J

JANSENISM: We don't know what it is, but it's very fashionable to talk about.
JAPAN: Everything there is made of porcelain.
JASPER: All vases in museums are made of jasper.
JAVELIN: Just as useful as a rifle, if one knows how to use it.
JEALOUSY: Always preceded by "mad." Terrible passion. A knit brow is a proof of jealousy.
JESUITS: Have a hand in every revolution. We don't suspect how many there are. Never speak of "the battle of Jesuits."
JEW: Son of Israel. All Jews are spyglass merchants.
JOCKEY: Deplore the race of jockeys.
JOCKEY CLUB: The members are all very rich and jovial young men (q.v.). Calling it simply "the Jockey" is very chic and makes you look like you belong.
JOHN BULL: When one doesn't know an Englishman's name, call him John Bull.
JOY: The mother of fun and games. One should never mention her house.
JUDGESHIP: Fine career for marrying upward. All judges are pederasts.
JUJUBE: No one knows what it's made of.
JUNE BUG: Children of springtime. Fine subject for a pamphlet. Their eradication is every

mayor's dream. When speaking of the ravages they cause in a speech at agricultural fairs, one should tar them as "insidious pests."

JURY: Avoid being on one at all costs.

JUSTICE: Never concern yourself with it.

K

KALEIDOSCOPE: Used only with regard to painting exhibits.

KEEPSAKE: Should be found on a living room coffee table.

KIOSK: Place in a park where delights are found.

KISS: Saying "embrace" is more decent. Tenderly stolen. A kiss should be "bestowed": on the forehead of a young girl, the cheek of a married lady, the hand of a belle, the neck of a child, and the lips of a mistress.

KNIFE: Is Catalan when the blade is long. Is called a dagger when used to commit a crime.

KNOT (Gordian): Has some relation to Antiquity. (The Ancients' way of knotting their neckties.)

KNOUT: Word that offends Russians.

KORAN: A book mostly about women, by Mohammed.

L

LABORATORY: You need one in the country.

LABORERS: Where would we be without them?

LACKEY: Grave insult, in grand style, to be used against a political adversary: "Sir, you are but a lackey of the Palace cliques!" Must be delivered from the rostrum of the Chamber.

LACUSTRINE CITIES: Deny their existence, since no one can live underwater.

LADY: Always first. "God bless them." In some cases, the term should not be used.

LA FAYETTE: General famous for his white horse.

LA FONTAINE: Maintain that you have never read his tales. Call him "The Immortal Fabulist."

LAGOON: City on the Adriatic.

LAKE: Have female company when rowing on one.

LANCET: Always keep one in your pocket, but be afraid to use it.

LANDLORD: Human beings are divided into two great classes: landlords and tenants.

LANDSCAPES (Painted): Always look like a mess of spinach.

LANGUAGES (Living): The misfortunes of France stem from the fact that we don't know enough of them.

LATE (*adj.*): "My late father," and raise your hat.

LATIN: Man's natural language. Spoils writing. Is useful only for reading the inscriptions

on public fountains. Beware of Latin quotations, they always contain something risqué.

LAUGHTER: Always Homeric.

LAURELS: Keep one from resting.

LAW (The): No one knows what it is. Is killing us. With it, no government is possible.

LAWYERS: Too many of them in the Chamber of Deputies. Have faulty judgment. Say of a lawyer who is not well-spoken: "Yes, but he really knows his subject!"

LEAGUE: You can travel a league faster than you can travel three miles.

LEARNED (person): Make fun of him. All it takes to be learned is memory and hard work.

LEATHER: All leather comes from Russia.

LEFT-HANDERS: Formidable fencers. More adroit than right-handers.

LETHARGY: Some recorded cases have lasted for years.

LIBRARY: Always have one at home, especially when living in the country.

LICENTIOUSNESS: Seen only in big cities.

LIGHT: Always say, *Fiat lux*! when someone lights a candle.

LIGUE (political party): Precursor of liberalism in France.

LILAC: Gives pleasure because is a harbinger of summer.

LION: Is generous. Always plays with a ball. Roar, lion, roar! And to think that the lion and the tiger are just cats!

LITERATURE: The occupation of idle people.

LITTRÉ: Snicker when hearing his name. "The fellow who says we're descended from apes!"

LORD: Rich Englishman.

LOUIS XVI: Always say, "That unfortunate monarch…"

LOVELY: Used for anything pleasing. "How very lovely!" is the height of admiration.

LUCKY: When speaking of a lucky man: "He was born with his cap on." We don't know what this means, and the listener won't either.

LUXURY: The downfall of States.

LYNX: Animal famous for its eye.

M

MACARONI: Should be served with the hands when it is Italian-style.

MACHIAVELLI: Do not read him, but label him a scoundrel.

MACHIAVELLIANISM: Word to be pronounced with a shudder.

MACKINTOSH: Scottish philosopher. The inventor of rubber.

MAESTRO: Italian word meaning pianist.

MAGIC: Scoff at it.

MAIDEN: Used only for Joan of Arc, and with "of Orléans."

MAIDS: All bad. Good help is hard to find these days!
MAJOR: Now found only at captain's tables.
MAKEUP: Ruins the skin.
MALEDICTION: Always pronounced by a father.
MALTHUS: Do not read him, but label him a scoundrel: "the unspeakable Malthus."
MAMLUKS: Ancient people of the Orient (Egypt).
MANDOLIN: Indispensable for seducing Spanish women.
MARBLE: All statues are made of Paros marble.
MARSEILLES: Its residents are all witty.
MARTYRS: All the early Christians were.
MASK: Confers wit.
MATERIALISM: Pronounce this word with horror in one's voice, stressing every syllable.
MATHEMATICS: Dry out the heart.
MATTRESS: The harder it is, the better for you.
MAXIM: Never new but always comforting.
MAYOR (Town): Always ridiculous. Feels insulted when referred to as "alderman."
MECHANICS: The inferior part of mathematics.
MEDALLION: They made them in Antiquity.
MEDICAL STUDENTS: Sleep near corpses. Some even eat them.
MEDICINE: Scoff at it when one is feeling fit.
MEERSCHAUM: Is found in the earth. Pipes are made of it.
MELANCHOLY: Sign of a distinguished heart and an elevated mind.
MELODRAMAS: Less immoral than dramas.
MELON: Good topic of table discussion: "Is it a vegetable or a fruit?" English people eat it for dessert, which is remarkable.
MEMORY: Complain about your own, and even brag about not having any. But protest strenuously if someone should question your sense of judgment.
MEPHISTOPHELEAN: Should be said of any bitter laugh.
MERCURY: Kills the illness along with the patient.
METALLURGY: Very fashionable.
METAMORPHOSIS: Laugh about the time when they believed in it. Ovid is its inventor.
METAPHORS: There are always too many of them in an author's style.
METAPHYSICS: Laughing at it is proof of a superior mind.
METHOD: Serves no purpose.
MEXICO: "The Mexican expedition is the reign's greatest idea" (Rouher).
MIDNIGHT: Time limit for gaiety and decent pleasures; anything done past this hour is immoral.
MIGHT: Always Herculean. "Might makes right" (Bismarck).
MILK: Dissolves oysters. Attracts snakes. Whitens skin. Parisian women bathe in it every

morning.

MIND: Always preceded by "agile." Great minds think alike.

MINISTER: Bottom rung of human achievement.

MINUTE: People have no idea how long a minute can be.

MISSIONARIES: Are all eaten or crucified.

MISSIVE: Nobler than "letter."

MOB: Always has sound instincts. *Turba ruit* or *ruunt*. "The vile multitude" (Thiers). "The mob is the mother of tyrants," etc.

MODELING: Say about any statue one is looking at, "The modeling is quite good."

MODESTY: A woman's most beautiful adornment.

MOLE: Blind as a mole. And yet, it has eyes.

MONARCHY: The constitutional monarchy is the best of all republics.

MONEY: The root of all evil. *Auri sacra fames*. The modern god (not to be confused with Apollo). Ministers call it a remuneration, notaries a fee, doctors an honorarium, employees a compensation, workers a salary, and domestics wages. It can't buy happiness.

MONK: Follower of Onan.

MONOPOLY: Thunder against it.

MONSTERS: No one sees them anymore.

MOON: Inspires melancholy. Could it be inhabited?

MORTGAGE: Demand "reforms to the mortgage system"—very chic.

MOSAIC: Its secret is lost.

MOSQUITO: More dangerous than any wild beast.

MOUNTEBANK: Always preceded by "cheap."

MUSCLES: The muscles of strong men are always like steel.

MUSEUM: Versailles: traces the highlights of our national glory; an excellent idea of King Louis-Philippe's. The Louvre: young ladies should avoid it. Dupuytren: a good thing to show young men.

MUSHROOMS: Eat only ones that come from the market.

MUSIC: Reminds one of many things. Soothes the savage breast. Example: "The Marseillaise."

MUSICIAN: A true musician composes no music, plays no instrument, and despises virtuosos.

MUSSELS: Always give you indigestion.

MUSTACHE: Gives one a martial look.

MUSTARD: The only good mustard is from Dijon. Ruins the stomach.

N

NAPLES: When speaking with someone learned, say Parthenope. See Naples and die! (v. *Yvetot*).

NATURE: Ah, the delights of nature! Say this every time you find yourself in the country.

NAVIGATOR: Always hardy.

NECTAR: Confuse it with ambrosia.

NEGRESSES: Warmer than white women (v. *blondes* and *brunettes*).

NEGROES: Be amazed that their saliva is white—and that they can speak French.

NEIGHBORS: Try to have them do favors for you without it costing you anything.

NEOLOGISM: The downfall of the French language.

NERVES: Said whenever one doesn't understand an illness; this explanation satisfies the listener.

NEWSPAPERS: One cannot do without them but should thunder against. Their importance in modern society. Leave copies of the serious papers lying around the living room, making sure to rumple the pages first. Marking a few passages with a red pencil also produces a highly favorable effect. In the morning, read an article in one of these serious and weighty periodicals; and in the evening, when in company, cleverly lead the conversation around to the article's topic in order to shine.

NIGHTMARE: Comes from the stomach.

NORMANS: Think that they have a funny accent, and tease them about their cotton bonnets.

NOSTRILS: If upturned, a sign of lechery.

NOTARIES: At this point, don't trust them.

NOVELS: Pervert the masses. Are less immoral in serial form than in volumes. Only historical novels can be tolerated, because at least they teach history. Some novels are written with the point of a scalpel; others rest on the tip of a needle.

NUMISMATICS: Related to the high sciences. Inspires immense respect.

O

OASIS: Inn of the desert.

OBSCENITY: All scientific words derived from Greek or Latin conceal an obscenity.

OBVIOUS: Always blindingly, unless it's plain for all to see.

OCTOGENARIAN: Term for any old person.

ODALISQUE: All Oriental women are odalisques (v. *dancing girl*).

ODEON: Joke about its remoteness.

ODOR (Foot): Sign of good health.

OFFENBACH: The moment one hears his name, one must cross two fingers to ward off the evil eye. Very Parisian—looks smart.

OLD PERSON: Concerning a flood, storm, etc., old people in the countryside can never remember seeing one like it.

OLIVE OIL: Is never good. You need to have a friend in Marseilles who can send you a little barrel.
OMEGA: Second letter of the Greek alphabet, since people always say "the alpha and the omega."
OMNIBUS: One never finds a seat in it. Was invented by Louis XIV. "I, sir, have seen tricycles that had but three wheels!"
OPTIMIST: Synonym for imbecile.
ORATION: Any speech by Bossuet.
ORCHESTRA: Image of society: everyone plays a part and there's a leader.
ORCHITIS: Gentleman's ailment.
ORDER: How many crimes are committed in thy name! (v. *freedom*).
ORGAN: Elevates the soul toward God.
ORIENTALIST: Man who has traveled extensively.
ORIGINAL: Scoff at anything original, hate it, reject it, exterminate it if possible.
OSTRICH: Digests stones.
OTTER: Used to make caps and vests.
OUTSKIRTS (of city): Terrible in times of revolution.
OYSTERS: No longer eaten. They're too expensive!

P

PAGANINI: Never tuned his violin. Famous for the length of his fingers.
PAIN: Always has a favorable outcome. Real pain is always held in check.
PAINTING ON GLASS: The secret is lost.
PALFREY: White animal of the Middle Ages, now extinct.
PALLADIUM: Ancient fortress.
PALM TREE: Adds local color.
PALMYRA: Queen of Egypt? Ruins? Who knows?
PAMPHLETEERING: No one does this anymore.
PANHANDLING: Should be banned and never is.
PANTHEISM: Thunder against it: absurd.
PARADE: Always cite the Thermopylae. Parades in the Vosges are the Thermopylae of France (said frequently in 1870).
PARADOX: Always said on Boulevard des Italiens, between two puffs of a cigarette.
PARALLEL (historical): One should choose only from among the following: Caesar and Pompeius, Horace and Virgil, Voltaire and Rousseau, Napoleon and Charlemagne, Goethe and Schiller, Bayard and MacMahon…
PARIS: The great prostitute. Heaven for women, hell for horses.
PARTHIAN SHOT: Wax indignant at, though it is perfectly admissible.

PARTS: Are shameful for some, natural for others.
PATIENT: To make a patient feel better, laugh at his illness and deny his suffering.
PEDANTRY: Must be ridiculed, except when applied to superficial matters.
PEDERASTY: Illness that afflicts all men at a certain age.
PELICAN: Pierces its own flanks to feed its young. Emblem of the good father.
PEOPLE: One's enemies. The cause of one's ruin.
PERIOD (of revolutions): Always ongoing, since each new government promises to end it.
PERSPIRATION (Foot): Sign of good health.
PERU: Land where everything is made of gold.
PHAETHON: Inventor of the vehicles that bear his name.
PHEASANT: Very chic in a dinner.
PHILIPPE ÉGALITÉ: Yet another cause of the Revolution. Committed every crime of that nefarious period.
PHILOSOPHY: One should always snicker at it.
PHOENIX: Perfect name for an accident insurance company.
PHOTOGRAPHY: Will dethrone painting (v. *daguerreotype*).
PIANO: Indispensable in a salon.
PIDGIN: One must always speak pidgin to be understood by a foreigner, no matter what his nationality. Also used in telegraphy.
PIG: Since the inside of its body is "just like a man's," one should use them in hospitals to teach anatomy.
PIGEON: Should only be eaten with peas.
PILLOW: Never use one, it makes you hunchbacked.
PIMPLES: On the face or elsewhere, a sign of good health and circulation. Never drain them.
PINCE-NEZ: Haughty and distinguished.
PIPE: Not socially appropriate, except at the seashore.
PITY: Always guard against it.
PLANETS: Were all discovered by Leverrier.
PLANT: Always cures the part of the body that it resembles.
PLEASURE: Obscene word.
PLICA POLONICA: If you cut your hair, it bleeds.
POACHERS: All ex-convicts. Responsible for every crime committed in the countryside. Should arouse unreasoning fury. "No, sir, no pity!"
POCKMARKED: Pockmarked women are all lascivious.
POET: Synonym for dreamer and ninny.
POETRY: Is utterly useless. Out of fashion.
POLICE: Always in the wrong.
POLICEMAN: Society's first line of defense. Say "law enforcement" or "constabulary."

POLISHING: If you want it done right, do it yourself.
PONSARD: The only poet who had good sense.
POOR (The): Caring for them makes up for every other virtue.
POPILIUS: Invented a kind of circle.
PORK BUTCHER: Stories of paté made with human flesh. All pork butchers have pretty wives.
PORTFOLIO: Carrying one under your arm makes you look like a minister.
PORTLINESS: Sign of wealth and sloth.
POULTICE: Must always be applied while waiting for the doctor to come.
PRACTICE: Makes perfect. Better than theory. With practice, one can learn to play the violin like Paganini.
PRADON: Never forgive him for having been Racine's rival.
PRAGMATIC SANCTION: We don't know what this is.
PRANK: Must be played when one is on a country outing with the ladies.
PREOCCUPATION: Is all the deeper if one's absorption causes one to stand still.
PRIAPISM: Ancient cult.
PRIESTS: Should be castrated. Sleep with their maids, and have children that they call their "nephews." All the same, there are good ones.
PRINCIPLES: Always debatable. One can never tell their nature or their number. No matter, are sacred.
PRINTED: One should believe everything that is printed. Seeing one's name in print! There are people who commit crimes solely for that reason.
PRINTING PRESS: A marvelous discovery. Has done more harm than good.
PROFESSOR: Always learned.
PROGRESS: Always misunderstood and too hasty.
PROPAGANDA TRACTS: Despise them. No need to know a single one.
PROPELLER: The future of mechanics.
PROPERTY: One of the fundaments of society. More sacred than religion.
PROSE: Easier to write than verse.
PROSTITUTE: A necessary evil. Keeps our daughters and sisters safe, so long as there are bachelors around. Should be chased away without pity. One can no longer go out with one's wife because there are so many of them on the boulevard. Are always girls from poor families corrupted by rich bourgeois.
PROVIDENCE: What would we do without it?
PRUNES: Keep the stomach unencumbered.
PUNCH: Suitable for a boys' night out. Makes people delirious. Turn out the lights when setting a match to it—the flame is fantastic!
PURPLE: Nobler word than "red."
PYRAMID: Pointless labor.

Q

QUESTION: To ask it is to answer it.

R

RACINE: Naughty!

RADICALISM: All the more dangerous for being latent. The Republic encourages us toward radicalism.

RAFT: Always "of the Medusa."

RAGE: Stirs up the blood. Hygienic to fly into one now and then.

RAILROAD: If Napoleon had had them, he would have been invincible! Be ecstatic about the invention and say, "Sir, as surely as I'm standing here, I was in X this morning, I took the train for Y, did what I had to do, and was back by Z o'clock!"

RAILROAD STATIONS: Become ecstatic at and offer them as a models of architecture.

RAINCOAT: Very advantageous as outerwear. Harmful because it blocks perspiration.

RATTAN: A walking stick should be made of it.

REDHEADS: V. *blondes*, *brunettes*, and *Negresses*.

REFERENCES: Guarantee for families and parents. Are always favorable.

RELATIVES: Always a nuisance. Keep the poor ones out of sight.

RELIGION: A fundament of society. Necessary for the common folk, to a point. "The religion of our ancestors," should be said unctuously.

REPUBLICAN: Republicans are not all thieves, but all thieves are republicans.

RESTAURANT: Always order dishes that you wouldn't normally eat at home. When at a loss, choose what your neighbor is having.

REVERIE: Lofty thought that no one understands.

RHYME: Never in tune with reason.

RIFLE: In the country, always keep one handy.

RING: It is very distinguished to wear one on your index finger. Wearing it on your thumb is too Oriental. Wearing rings deforms the fingers.

ROBE (official): Inspires respect.

ROMANCES: Singers of romances appeal to the ladies.

RONSARD: Ridiculous, with his Greek and Latin words.

ROOSTER: A thin man should always say that the finest roosters are never fat.

ROUSSEAU: Believe that Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jean-Baptiste Rousseau were brothers, like the two Corneilles.

RUINS: Induce reveries and make a landscape look poetic.

S

SACRILEGE: It's sacrilege to cut down a tree.

SAFES: Their combinations are very easy to crack.
SAINT BARTHOLOMEW'S DAY: Old wives' tale.
SAINT HELENA: Island known for its boulder.
SAINTE-BEUVE: On Good Friday, ate only pork products.
SALE: Selling and buying, the aim of life.
SALON: Frequenting one at the start of a literary career sets a fellow up nicely.
SALT SHAKER: Knocking one over brings bad luck.
SAPPHIC AND ADONIC (verse): Produces an excellent effect in a literary article.
SATRAP: Rich and debauched man.
SATURNALIA: Celebrations under the Directory.
SAUSAGE: Sign of domestic happiness. Indispensable at Christmas dinner!
SAVINGS BOX: Opportunity for the servants to steal.
SCAFFOLD: When mounting it, be sure to utter several eloquent phrases before dying.
SCARF: Looks poetic.
SCHOOL (Public): Nobler than private school.
SCHOOLS: Polytechnic Institute: every mother's dream for her son [*Obs.*]. Terror of the bourgeois caught in a demonstration when he realizes the Polytechnic has sided with the workers [*Obs.*]. Calling it "the Poly" makes it look like you went there. Saint-Cyr military academy: young men from aristocratic families. The medical school: all fanatics. The law school: young men of good family.
SCIENCE: A little science leads you away from religion, a lot of it brings you back.
SCUDÉRY: Scoff at the name, without knowing if it belonged to a man or a woman.
SCURF: Sign of good health (v. *pimples*).
SEA: Is bottomless. Image of the infinite. Confers great thoughts. One should always have a telescope when at the seashore. When contemplating the sea, always murmur, "So much water! So much water!"
SEALED: Always preceded by "hermetically."
SEASICKNESS: To avoid feeling it, simply think about something else.
SEAT: Always ask for one.
SECRETION: Be pleased when it comes out, and amazed that the human body can produce so much of it.
SENECA: Wrote at a golden desk.
SERFS: Example to show one's son, if anyone knew where to find them.
SERIAL NOVELS: Cause of demoralization. Argue about the probable outcome. Write to the author to suggest ideas. Fury at finding a character with your name.
SEVILLE: Famous for its barber. See Seville and die! (v. *Naples*).
SHEETS: All sheets come from Elbeuf.
SHELL: Useful for making pendulums and inkwells.
SHEPHERDS: All sorcerers. Their specialty is conversing with the Holy Virgin.

SIGH: Should be let out in a woman's presence.
SIGNATURE: The more complicated the flourishes, the more beautiful the signature.
SINGER: Eats a fresh egg every morning to clear the voice. The tenor always sounds tender and charming, the baritone sympathetic and resonant, and the bass has a powerful delivery.
SITE: Place for composing verses.
SKIFF: Any small boat carrying a woman. "Come aboard my skiff!"
SLEEP: Too much of it thickens the blood.
SNAKE: Very poisonous.
SNEEZE: After someone says "Bless you," launch a discussion about the historical origin of that expression. It's witty to say, "Russians and Poles don't speak to each other, they sneeze at each other!"
SNIPER: More fearsome than the enemy.
SOIL: Feel great affection for the soil.
SOLICITOR: Salacious word.
SOLID: Always followed by "as a rock."
SOMBREUIL (Mlle. de): Recall the glass of blood.
SOMNAMBULIST: Walks at night along the crests of rooftops.
SON-IN-LAW: "My son-in-law, all is ruined!"
SOUTH (cooking of): Always calls for garlic. Thunder against it.
SOUTHERNERS: All poets.
SPELLING: Believe in it like geometry. Is not necessary when one has style.
SPINACH: The stomach's broom. Never miss a chance to use Prudhomme's famous quip: "I dislike it, and I'm glad I dislike it, for if I liked it I'd eat it, and I can't stand it." (Some people find this perfectly logical and won't laugh.)
SPIRITUALISM: The best philosophical system.
SPURS: Improve the look of boots.
SPY: Always from the upper crust (v. *swindler*).
SQUARING THE CIRCLE: We don't know what this is, but one should shrug one's shoulders when speaking of it.
SQUIRE (Country): Hold them in the utmost contempt.
STACK: Stacking weapons is the most difficult maneuver in the national guard.
STALLION: Always vigorous. A woman should not know the difference between a stallion and a horse.
STAR: Everyone has his own, like the Emperor.
STOCK MARKET: Barometer of public opinion.
STOCK TRADERS: All thieves.
STOICISM: Is impossible.
STOMACH: Every illness originates in the stomach.

STONES: Should always be brought back from the seashore.
STOOGES: Word used by fanatical republicans to designate the police.
STRONG: As a Turk, an ox, a horse, Hercules. That fellow must be strong, he's all sinew.
STUART (Marie): Be moved by her fate.
STUD FARMS: The question of. Good topic for parliamentary debate.
STUDENT: All of them wear red berets and shabby trousers, smoke their pipes in the street, and never study.
SUFFRAGE (Universal): The final step in political science.
SUICIDE: Proof of cowardice.
SUIT (Black): In the provinces, the ultimate in ceremony and inconvenience.
SUMMER: Always exceptional (v. *winter*).
SUPPERS *under the Regency*: They uncorked more wit than champagne.
SURGEONS: Are hardhearted; call them butchers.
SWALLOW: Never call them anything but "harbingers of spring." Since no one knows where they come from, say they have arrived "from the beyond" (poetic).
SWAN: Sings before dying. Its wing can break a man's leg. The Swan of Cambrai was not a bird but a man named Fénelon. The Swan of Mantua is Virgil. The Swan of Pesaro is Rossini.
SWINDLER: Always from the upper crust (v. *spy*).
SWORD: The only one known is Damocles's. Be nostalgic for the time when people wore them. "Brave as his sword." Some swords have never been used. The French want to be governed by it.
SYBARITES: Thunder against them.
SYPHILIS: Pretty much everyone has it.

T

TALLEYRAND (Prince): Thunder against him.
TARTAN (vessel): "Come into my tartan, beautiful dark-eyed Grecian" (romance).
TASTE: Simplicity is always in good taste. Should always be said to a woman apologizing for the modesty of her toilette.
TAXES: One should avoid paying them (v. *customs*).
TEN (The Council of): We're not sure what it was, but it was formidable! Deliberately masked. Still makes one shudder.
THICKET: Always dark and impenetrable.
THINKING: Painful. The things that force you into it are generally abandoned.
THIRTEEN: Avoid having thirteen people at table, it brings bad luck. Wags should never fail to joke, "What difference does it make? I'll eat for two"—or if there are ladies present, to ask if one of them is expecting.

THUNDERS FROM THE VATICAN: Scoff at them.
TIGHTS: Very alluring.
TOAD: Secretes a deadly venom. Lives inside of rocks.
TOBACCO: The kind sold by the Tobacco Authority is not as good as the contraband. A pinch of snuff suits a man of letters. Cause of all diseases of the brain and spinal chord.
TOILETTE (Ladies'): Excites the imagination.
TONIC (for purifying the blood): Should be taken in private.
TOOTH: Ruined by: cider, tobacco, candies, ice cream, sleeping with one's mouth open, and drinking wine after the soup course. Eyetooth: dangerous to remove because it's related to the eye. Having a tooth pulled "is no picnic."
TOYS: Should always be educational.
TRANSFER: The only verb used by army men.
TROUBADOUR: Fitting motif for a pendulum.

U

UKASE: Call any authoritarian decree a "ukase": it rankles the government.
UNDERGARMENT: One always shows too much, and never enough.
UNION OF THE ROYAL FAMILIES: Keep hoping for it.
UNIVERSITY: *Alma mater*.
UNLEASH: One unleashes dogs and wicked passions.
URCHIN: Always from Paris.
USUM (*Ad*): Latin locution that works well in the phrase *Ad usum Delphini*. Should always be used when speaking of a woman named Delphine.

V

VACCINE: Frequent only vaccinated individuals.
VELVET: On clothing, sign of distinction and wealth.
VERRES: He still hasn't been forgiven.
VILE: Should be said of any artistic or literary work that *Le Figaro* considers unworthy of admiration.
VIZIER: Quakes at the sight of a pull-cord.
VOLTAIRE: Known for his awful "grimace." His knowledge was superficial.
VOYAGE: Should be taken quickly.
VOYAGER: Always intrepid.

W

WAG: All Parisians are wags, even though nine out of every ten are from the provinces. People in Paris don't do any work.

WAGNER: Snicker when his name is mentioned, and make jokes about the music of the future.

WALK: Always take a walk after dinner, it helps the digestion.

WALTZ: Wax indignant at. Lascivious and impure dance that is appropriate only for old women.

WAR: Thunder against it.

WATCH: Only good if made in Geneva. In fairy tales, when a character pulls out his pocket watch, it should always be an onion: the joke never fails. "Does your watch keep good time?" "The sun rises and sets by it."

WATER: Paris water causes stomach aches. Seawater holds you up to swim. Cologne water smells good.

WEALTH: Compensates for everything, even lack of respect.

WEATHER: Endless topic of conversation. Cause of every illness. Always complain about it.

WELL-WRITTEN: An expression used by porters to designate the serial novels they enjoy.

WHITEWASH IN CHURCHES: Thunder against it. This artistic fury suits one very well.

WILD ANIMAL TAMERS: Use obscene methods.

WINDBAG: His only use is to inflate balloons.

WINDMILL: Looks good in a landscape.

WINES: Topic of conversation among men. The best is Bordeaux, since doctors prescribe it. The worse it tastes, the more natural it is.

WINTER: Always exceptional (v. *summer*). Better for health than the other seasons.

WITNESS: One must always refuse to be a witness in court cases: you never know where it can lead.

WOMAN: Person of the opposite sex. One of Adam's ribs. Never say "the little woman" but "my wife," or better still, "my better half."

WOODEN SHOES: A rich man who started off poor always arrived in Paris wearing wooden shoes.

WOODS: The woods set you dreaming. Are perfect for composing verses. In autumn, while taking a stroll, one should declaim, "From the remnants of our woods…," etc.

WORKER: Always honest, unless he's rioting.

WORN: Everything old shows wear and everything that shows wear is old. Keep this in mind when buying antiques.

WRITING: *Currente calamo* is the excuse for stylistic or grammatical errors.

Y

YAWN: One should say, "Forgive me, it isn't the company, it's my stomach."

YOUNG GIRL: Pronounce these words shyly. All young girls are pale, frail, and pure. Keep them away from any kind of book, visits to museums, the theater, and especially the monkey house at the zoo.

YOUNG MAN: Always sewing wild oats. He should be! Be amazed when he isn't.

YOUTH: How beautiful youth is! Is wasted on the young. Declaim these Italian verses whenever possible, even without understanding them: "*O Primavera*! *Gioventù dell'anno*! *O Gioventù*! *Primavera della vita*!"

YVETOT: See Yvetot and die! (v. *Naples* and *Seville*).

Catalogue of Fashionable Ideas

Defense of slavery
of Saint Bartholomew's Day.
–Making fun of those who were good at composition
idem, the learned
idem, classical studies
Say about a great man, "He is completely overrated."—All the great men are; besides, there are no great men.
Admiration for Mr. de Maistre
Veuillot
Stendhal
Proudhon
Voltaire's superficial knowledge.
Raphael had no talent
Mirabeau had no talent
—but his father (whom no one reads), that's another story!
Molière, the rug-merchant of literature.
Charron, much better than Montaigne!
A. Musset, much better than Hugo.
Homer never existed.
Shakespeare never existed. His plays were all written by Bacon.

Fashionable ideas—Bouvard and Pécuchet
As a pendant to the *Dictionary of Accepted Ideas*, Prudhomme's dogmas, the assertions of wags

= paradoxes currently in vogue, fashionable or chic ideas.
– Defense of Saint Bartholomew's
– Defense of slavery
– Molière, "the rug-merchant of literature" "Raphael had no talent"
– All the great men are overrated:
How do you sleep, Voltaire?
Voltaire's superficial knowledge

Rabelais, “the trash-picker of humanity,” Lamartine.

Hatred of classical studies.

– Mr. de Maistre!—admiration for Veuillot.

– Mirabeau: “no talent” (why is he so hated? because people despise Freedom!)—but his father!—and quote one sentence: “poor frightened bird caught between four turrets.”

– Racine

– Stendhal

Popular enthusiasms:
The giraffe
Lafayette
The dey of Algiers
Dufavel the well digger
Lacenaire
Mme. Lafarge
Lamartine
The Prince President
The young Hua
Tom Thumb
Uncle Tom
Tropmann
Rochefort.

[*] At least in the present day. In the early 1900s, on the other hand, a debate raged over whether or not Flaubert knew "how to write" at all, stemming from the intentional bending in his prose of grammatical and syntactic etiquette. In this context, Bouvard and Pécuchet's grappling with the principles of aesthetics in chapter 5 becomes especially comic.

[*] A noble claim, but not strictly sincere: in those thirteen years, Flaubert wrote and published the lengthy novels *Salammbo* and *Sentimental Education* and rewrote *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*.

[*] Nor is this the only novel in which he treated the theme: a foreshadowing of Bouvard and Pécuchet's impenetrable smugness can be found in *Bovary's* Homais, while their hair-pulling naiveté calls to mind Emma Bovary's fantasies about love or the simpleton's progress of Frédéric Moreau in *Sentimental Education*. And Maxime du Camp recalled Flaubert talking about a project very similar to *Bouvard and Pécuchet* as early as 1843. See also Raymond Queneau's discussion, in the preface that follows this one, of Flaubert's indebtedness to Barthélemy Maurice's 1841 story "Les deux Greffiers."

[*] And not just the weather, but the specific mention of "ninety-two degrees"—a precision that adds to the sense of hyperreality characteristic of stereotype. Curiously enough, not one of the three previous translations of *Bouvard and Pécuchet* has maintained Flaubert's precision in this opening sentence.

[*] The French word *cloporte* means both “woodlouse,” and, figuratively, a “nobody.”—*Trans.*

[*] As indicated by both the X and the present tense, this paragraph was left unfinished by Flaubert, who had asked his protégé Maupassant to find him a suitable plant name. Maupassant finally did send the requested infromation, but Flaubert died three days later, without completing the passage.—*Trans.*